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WHAT THE BEATITUDES TEACH
TOD LINDBERG

END OF DREAMS, RETURN OF HISTORY
ROBERT KAGAN

HELD BACK
FREDERICK M. HESS AND
CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

SUPPLY, DEMAND & KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS
SALLY SATEL

ALSO: ESSAYS AND REVIEWS BY
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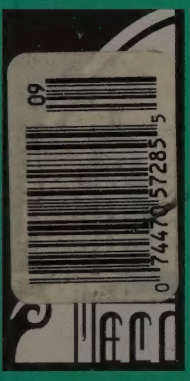

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Tad and Dianne Taube Research Fellow, Hoover Institution

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What the Beatitudes Teach

By Tod Lindberg

The Sermon on the Mount has long been rightly understood as both a starting-point and a summation of Jesus's teaching. It begins with the Beatitudes (Mt. 5:3-12), in which Jesus delineates the categories of people he says enjoy special favor. The Beatitudes are all familiar to us as sayings, the best known being *blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*. But what, really, are they? Is Jesus merely pronouncing a blessing, offering good wishes to those whom he chooses to single out? In fact, there's more to the story than that.

The Beatitudes provide a dizzying commentary designed to turn upside down the political and social world of the Roman Empire of Caesar Augustus and of the Jewish religious elite of Judea and Jerusalem. This is the opening move of a more drastic and fundamental reassessment of political

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Tod Lindberg is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and editor of Policy Review. *This essay is excerpted from his new book,* The Political Teachings of Jesus *(HarperCollins).*

and social affairs, applying not only to its own time but to all future times, down to our day. More still: It points to the increasing fulfillment *in this world* of the promise of the human condition as such — and of the struggle against vast and daunting but not insurmountable obstacles that such fulfillment will require.

Jesus describes those who are truly fortunate, the lucky ones of their day. But it is not emperors, conquerors, priests, and the wealthy who enjoy this favor. Rather, it is the common people, those whom earthly success has largely passed by: the poor, the meek, the persecuted, the peacemakers. How can this be? Because though they may have been denied worldly success, what cannot be taken away from them is their potential to live rightly by one another. It is all too easy for those who enjoy the pleasures of this world to try to float above such obligations. Jesus goes on to say that so long as ordinary people stand for the right things and do not retreat in their rightness before those who seem to have more power, what's right will prevail. It's *their* kingdom — a kingdom organized not from the top down, but from the bottom up. In the Beatitudes, Jesus offers a description of the community of goodwill his teaching will build in this world.

EACH OF THE Beatitudes includes not only a statement about who is blessed, but also a short description of what is in store for each category of those who are blessed: The meek shall inherit the earth. Are those *predictions* Jesus is making? Or *promises* about what the future holds? If so, where? Only in the next world, or in this world as well?

In order to see the answers to these questions, we have to look at the Beatitudes not just individually, but in relation to each other. With these nine categories, Jesus offers a portrait of the ways in which it is possible to be a good person with respect to others — a description of the various forms human goodness, in this social sense, can take. This description is as true today as it was in his day, and if we are looking for the ways in which it is possible to be a good person today, we really need look no farther.

As for the predictions or promises, what Jesus has done with them is to imagine the consequences of a world comprised of more and more people attuned to the social good as he has described it. He offers in these few lines a description of what the world looks like when good people prevail over bad people — and he makes the bold claim that such a world will come to pass.

Jesus calls those who belong to the nine categories he specifies in Matthew "Blessed." The sense of the term here is "fortunate" or "prosperous." Who are the lucky ones? The "poor in spirit" are prosperous; "those who mourn" are fortunate; so are "the gentle"; and "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"; and "the merciful"; and "the pure in heart"; and "the peacemakers"; and "those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness"; finally, says Jesus, fortunate are "you when people insult you

and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

By now, we are used to the idea of wishing well for those who are downtrodden, who are oppressed, who can't get a break, who have fallen on hard times. This is in no small measure a product of the teaching of Jesus itself, in this passage and elsewhere. Those in his time who heard him speak words such as these, however, had a different general outlook and set of expectations. Theirs was a world in which robbers could leave a man for dead on the side of a road, and it was unclear whether anyone would stop to help.[1] The exalted were truly exalted — the rich, the royal, the Sadducees and Pharisees, the imperial Roman officers, the tax collectors — and they often treated have-nots with undisguised contempt.

Here Jesus proposes a different hierarchy. To see whom he elevates in the Beatitudes, it may be helpful to conjure a list of qualities opposite to the ones he lists. Cumulatively, what emerges from this collection of "anti-Beatitudes" is a portrait of a privileged class, one that sees those below as essentially inferior. For "the poor in spirit," the opposite number might be someone arrogant in his righteousness and sense of superiority. For "those who mourn," we can substitute those whom the world has given cause for rejoicing. For "the gentle," the overbearing. For "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," we may find a contrast in those who are complacent on account of their privileges and defend them vigorously. For "the merciful," the unforgiving, perhaps the cruel: those who, when they have an advantage over another, even a temporary one, don't hesitate to exploit it.

From the beginning of his career, Jesus understood clearly the high stakes involved in his political teaching.

Opposite "the pure in heart" are those who are cunning in pursuit of their private gain. Opposite "the peacemakers" are those who act to create or aggravate conflict. Opposite "those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness" are those doing the persecuting, as opposite "you when people insult you . . . because of me" are those seeking to put down Jesus's teaching and those who follow it.

Far from feeling any sense of obligation toward those below, this elite dismisses them as irrelevant — or worse, sees them as objects to be used to its own advantage. In addition, the elite seeks to perpetuate its advantages, if necessary by silencing those (such as Jesus) who speak up for the downtrodden. There was much for the elite to lose if the teachings of Jesus caught on. Indeed, from the beginning of his career, Jesus understood quite clearly the high stakes involved in his political teaching.

Perhaps privileged *classes*, in the plural, captures the essence a little more precisely. It is an oversimplification to see the problem as simply one of

[1] See Luke 10:29–37, the "Good Samaritan."

haves versus have-nots. The have-nots have in common that they are oppressed, but their oppressors come in different guises, from the elite of the Temple to the occupying Romans. And we must bear in mind *how little* it takes to oppress. Some who are oppressed by the powerful above them may in turn oppress those below them with yet less power. Oppression can manifest itself in as little as a declined opportunity to show mercy out of the enjoyment of one's position of relative power — one's sense of superiority.

As it turns out, though, the have-nots have more going in their favor than they realize, and this is Jesus's message. For the poor in spirit, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those who mourn "shall be comforted." The gentle "shall inherit the earth." Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness "shall be satisfied." The merciful "shall receive mercy." The pure in heart "shall see God." The peacemakers "shall be called sons of God." As for those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, again, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And for those who are insulted, persecuted, and falsely accused because they adhere to and seek to exemplify Jesus's teaching, he tells them "rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great."

It is not only the next world to which Jesus refers. "The gentle," he says, "shall inherit the earth."

At first, it seems that Jesus sees the rectification of the worldly troubles of those whom he has described as "blessed" coming only in the next world, referring to heaven in three of the Beatitudes and in a fourth promising the sight of God. However, it is not *only* the next world to which Jesus refers. Most conspicuously, "the gentle," he says, "shall inherit the earth." This statement could not be more emphatically rooted in *this* world. It promises no less than *this world itself* to the gentle (or meek or humble). Note that Jesus does not say the gentle will take over the world or conquer the world: The way in which the gentle come to possess the world is not by becoming something other than what they are. Rather, the world comes to them — as an inheritance, a bequest. The language is striking. One obtains an inheritance upon the death of one's benefactor. This raises the question: a bequest from whom? We will soon see the answer.

Three of the other promises or predictions of the Beatitudes are at least as grounded in this world as they are in the next: *Where* will those who mourn "be comforted"? Where will those who hunger and thirst for righteousness "be satisfied"? Where will the merciful "receive mercy"? Come the time that the gentle do indeed "inherit the earth" — should such a world come to pass — it seems plausible that those who mourn will find the comfort Jesus has promised in such a world, that those who desire righteousness will find it, that the merciful will be shown mercy there.

Furthermore, we must also ask why the "pure in heart . . . will see God" only in heaven, since perhaps the uncorrupted heart could have access to a

vision of the divine on earth as well. Jesus does not speak of a "reward [explicitly] in heaven" here, as he does elsewhere. As for the peacemakers, who will be called "sons of God," will they be called this in heaven only? Or perhaps on earth, where they may be said to be doing the Lord's work — earthly emulators of Jesus with regard to the pursuit of peace.

Jesus speaks of this world prospectively: The gentle have *not yet* inherited it; those who desire righteousness are not yet satisfied. But whatever consolation they may draw in the present moment, listening to Jesus speak on the mountainside, that their hunger for righteousness will be satisfied in the next world, the future that Jesus describes points to a form of satisfaction in this world also.

THE BEATITUDES ARE organized according to a scale running from passivity and paralysis in this world, through increasing levels of engagement with it in accordance with what Jesus is teaching, up to a pinnacle of earthly conduct Jesus describes. The categories he delineates describe people we can recognize in our own day, from homeless shelters and nursing homes to the halls of power, at least on those occasions when people rise above their private ambitions and work for the public good.

We begin with the "poor in spirit." It is an ambiguous phrase, but one that evokes a sense of those incapable of taking care of themselves at all: the dejected, the demoralized, those in whom the spark has gone out. They have given up, resigning themselves to their lonely place at the bottom, beyond reach of all others.

Next come the mourners, whom we may think of as the temporarily incapacitated. For now, they are overwhelmed by a sense of grief and loss. They are perhaps unable to take care of themselves or to fulfill their responsibilities toward others. They once felt a connection to another or others — strongly enough to be reduced to incapacity by the loss. The loss of that connection in turn imperils all their other connections. Because they were once more robust, however, now there is at least the possibility that one day they will again be so, having recovered from their mourning.

Then there are the gentle, or meek or humble. They walk softly upon the earth, seeking to impose themselves on others as little as possible. They see to their obligations as best they can, but they take nothing from others and ask for nothing from them for themselves. They are satisfied with what they have, however meager it may be. They do not strive, but accept their circumstances.

The gentle are followed by those who desire righteousness. They, unlike the gentle and still less the poor in spirit, have surveyed the world around them and are dissatisfied with it, wishing instead for a world in which their desire for righteousness is fulfilled. Here, Jesus uses metaphorical language: He speaks of those who "hunger and thirst" for righteousness. All people

get hungry, all people get thirsty. Hunger and thirst are primordial and universal bodily desires.

Here, however, the desire Jesus speaks of — the desire for righteousness — is something whose satisfaction, unlike hunger and thirst, is not *of* the body. Having passed from the permanently dispirited (the poor in spirit) to the incapacitated (those who mourn) to the unstirred spirit of acquiescence (the gentle or meek), we arrive now at the moment when the human spirit becomes an active entity for the first time. People are no longer merely operated on — passive objects played with by natural forces or the will of other, stronger human beings. Instead, they stir of their own will, seeking for themselves something outside themselves.

Jesus specifies an object of desire that is distinctly human but not of the body: the desire for righteousness.

In the desire for food and drink, people are no different from other members of the animal kingdom. Jesus goes on to specify an object of desire that is distinctly human: the desire for righteousness. He invites us to take the desire for righteousness as the first stirring in all those who are not content *simply* to be, in the passive or debilitated senses he has already evoked.

So far, Jesus has not specifically said what this "righteousness" people desire is, but his language offers some clues. First of all, the Beatitudes categorize *groups* of people. He does not say "blessed is *the one* who is poor in spirit," but rather "blessed are the poor in spirit"; not "the mourner" but "those who mourn." From the start, Jesus's teaching is directed not merely to each solitary person who will one day stand before God for eternal judgment; instead, it includes an element that is social or political. It invites listeners — including the most downtrodden and oppressed — to recognize that they are not alone and to think beyond themselves. Wherever one of his listeners may fall, whether in one of his categories of the "blessed" or somewhere outside, the listener is not alone: Jesus calls people to think of themselves in relation to others like them, even if the others are people with whom they previously have felt nothing in common.

The second point concerns the specific group of "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." This Jesusian category describes a *common* desire. Although this desire is felt by individuals — I can feel or intuit or experience *my* desire in a way that I cannot feel *yours*, even if I know you are feeling it too — it is not unique to each person who feels it. Rather, it is a desire common to all. Jesus reinforces this sense of universality by saying that those who feel the desire for righteousness will be "satisfied"— that is, this universal desire will be fulfilled universally.

One person's desire for righteousness, in Jesus's teaching, doesn't necessarily bring that person into conflict with another's desire for righteousness. In fact, if two or more — indeed, many more — people are "blessed" in

their desire for righteousness and "shall be satisfied," then the satisfaction of their respective desires for righteousness would result in their mutual satisfaction. They would be satisfied as individuals — but all individuals desiring righteousness would likewise be satisfied. No individual's satisfaction could come at the price of another individual's failure to obtain satisfaction or the denial of satisfaction to the other. If someone's desire for righteousness necessarily conflicted with another person's desire for righteousness, then the generalization Jesus proffers, namely, that "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . . shall be satisfied," would not work out. Jesus holds out the prospect of reconciliation of each individual's desire for righteousness and universal fulfillment.

But what if I, as an individual hungering and thirsting for righteousness, conclude that I can obtain satisfaction for myself only at the expense of others? Well, it is clearly no solution if others who hunger and thirst for righteousness find out that I have obtained my fulfillment at the expense of their ability to find satisfaction. Another way to put this is that I have confused an *advantage* I have obtained over them with the satisfaction of my desire for righteousness. The conclusion, therefore, is that what I think of as the desire for righteousness within myself is actually something else — or, more simply, that I am wrong to think that what I have desired and obtained can properly be called "righteousness." Nevertheless, there *is* the desire, which *seems* like the desire for righteousness. What it needs is proper channeling.

Similarly, what if I satisfy myself at the expense of others and the others either don't see it or don't object? What if they are, for example, so poor in spirit, so ground down by oppression, that they cannot imagine anything different? Does this acquiescence somehow vindicate my claim to righteousness in satisfying myself at their expense? Can I say that I am in the right because of my natural or otherwise-given superiority over them, as demonstrated by their acceptance of my position of privilege? Jesus's answer is clearly "no." And the reason is simply this: *They* may not be able to speak up for themselves, but others can speak up for them — starting, of course, with Jesus. No overlord's sense of his own vindicated righteousness stands unchallenged. Such supposed righteousness is wrong-headed. A true desire for righteousness is of the kind that can be satisfied along with everyone else's true desire for righteousness.

An important distinction that Jesus makes is that to desire righteousness is not necessarily to act on that desire. How, then should one obtain satisfaction for one's desire? The beginning of the answer becomes clear in Jesus's next category of the blessed, the first category that specifies righteous action: In one's relations with other people — when one reaches beyond oneself toward another — one should be merciful.

Mercy is a quality within reach of everyone at one time or another. All mercy requires is a position of the barest advantage over another, even for

the most fleeting of moments. When someone is down — whether physically, psychologically, or emotionally — do you kick him or not? To show mercy is an action that doesn't necessarily require activity: In certain cases, no more than the refusal to press an advantage one has is an act of mercy.

The next deemed blessed are the "pure in heart." Such people will act out of no bad motive, but always in accordance with the purity of rightness within them. Uncorrupted inwardly, the pure in heart will act toward others without corruption, since it would not occur to such a person to cheat a friend or steal from a stranger or tell a lie.

After the "pure in heart" come "the peacemakers." Jesus's intention here is clearly broad, encompassing not only relations between nations and peoples but also all subsets of conflict, down to those between two people. Here we take another step outward. If purity of heart relates to how I govern my own conduct toward others, peacemaking has the potential to take me outside myself.

Mercy doesn't necessarily require activity: The refusal to press an advantage can be an act of mercy.

It may be that the peace I am trying to make is between me and someone else. In that case, I am seeking to remove from my own conduct the sources of conflict between me and you. But I have to go farther, to recruit another to the cause of peace — to persuade another that the benefits of peace are sufficiently great to justify the other's removal of internal impediments to it and then to provide the other with the benefits of peace once it has been made.

Clearly, the Jesusian instruction here will not be fulfilled through the imposition of the peace of the victor upon the vanquished. Nor will it be fulfilled by the purchase of peace at the cost of surrendering what is right. Neither "I win" nor "I surrender" will do. Peace must be *made*: At a minimum, there is a condition of mutuality involved between the parties. Along those same lines, peace*making* also becomes a matter of peace*keeping*: ensuring that the conditions for peace remain. Here, peace is more than the (temporary) absence of conflict, and by saying that "the peacemakers" are blessed, Jesus points to the importance of aspiring toward permanent peace and universal peace.

In some instances, peacemaking of the sort Jesus endorses here will be an exercise in reaching even further beyond oneself, interposing between others in conflict to help them remove the sources of discord between them. With such peacemaking attempts, the presupposition is that such a peacemaker is already at peace with each of the two parties in conflict (otherwise the type of peacemaking described in the preceding paragraph would have to come first). But this suggests that my peace with each of them must not come at the expense of the continuation of their conflict with each other. If I perceive the conflict between them as a benefit to me, then I am failing to uphold peacemaking in its broadest, Jesusian sense. Making one's personal peace,

whatever it entails, does not fulfill the Jesusian prescription. Such a peace is insufficient if others remain in conflict, and it is incumbent upon one who is at peace with others to make peace *among* the others as well. As we will see later, Jesus regards the obligations of those who enjoy the benefits of living in a world shaped by his political teaching to be especially high with respect to those who are not so fortunate.

Jesus does not say specifically whether he refers to peace between and among individuals, families, tribes, societies, nations, or some other grouping. His lack of specificity invites the conclusion that he is referring to all of these levels of peacemaking. What if there is a conflict between the requirements of peace among individuals or families, for example, and the requirements of peace between nations? As an illustration, think of the American Civil War, in which, famously, brother sometimes fought against brother. Or think of Sophocles's story of Antigone, who was caught between her obligation to obey the command of her king and her obligation to provide a proper burial for her brother. If a broad peace is truly possible, there will have to be a way of eliminating or reconciling such conflicts.

The demand for righteousness comes as a threat to the advantage some enjoy over others.

Jesus next mentions "those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." In this group, we find those whose desire for right has been translated into action — the *pursuit* in the world of what is right in some fashion that is perceptible to others in the way mere "hunger and thirst," or desire, is not. Perhaps it is by demanding right treatment for themselves or for others. In any case, persecution may follow — from those whose wishes stand to be thwarted by the ones demanding what is right. The demand for righteousness comes as a threat to the advantage some enjoy over others. Those who have the advantage may take action to protect what they have — what they think of, erroneously, according to the Jesusian teaching, as rightly theirs. Of course, it is quite possible that those trying to be peacemakers will find themselves in this position, their efforts having failed not for want of trying but because they have given offense to those with the power to persecute.

Last mentioned are "you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." Jesus reserves pride of place for the followers of his teaching. That's because he believes his teaching is true. Considered as such, his teaching is the highest possible expression of righteousness. Jesus is perfectly aware that those who take his message to heart, act on it, and espouse it to others may run great risks in doing so. After all, his teaching is based on the proposition that people's hunger and thirst for righteousness can be universally satisfied, which in turn threatens those for whom vindication of their own, erroneous sense of right comes only at the expense of others. Such overlords are apt to resist.

Jesus promises possession of "the kingdom of heaven" to those in two of his categories: the poor in spirit and those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness. As for those who run afoul of the overlords because they are following his teaching, he says "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Jesus seems to be suggesting that the prophets' reward is great because they anticipated the message he brings. As for "rejoice and be glad," we must ask what the alternative is: to be ground down by the persecution one must suffer; to give up; to let go of the message of Jesus and to wallow, paralyzed, in one's despair; to become *poor in spirit*. In the Beatitudes, we have before us a full circle of good conduct, a complete typology of the "good person" or "good soul" (taking soul in the this-worldly sense of the part of a person that is not merely body) — from the lowest of the low (who harm no one but themselves) to the most exalted (those persecuted for their actions on behalf of what's right).

In the Beatitudes we have a complete typology of the "good person," from the lowest of the low to the most exalted.

It is no accident that the first category of the blessed, the poor in spirit, and the eighth and ninth, the persecuted, have in common the promised reward of heaven. Jesus is under no illusion about the difficulty of the advance of his message in this world. For some — those who have given up and those who are persecuted — he can promise no earthly reward at all (though he does promise a heavenly one). This is a harsh pronouncement, and we must not shrink from it.

Jesus's categories in the Beatitudes have in common his description of those who belong to them as "blessed." Clearly, it is good to be "blessed," and one can find favor in any of the groups. However, the amount of activity required to qualify for membership in each of them — the activity of taking care of oneself and others — progressively increases from one category to the next. The "poor in spirit" are indeed "blessed," but that does not mean one should *emulate* the poor in spirit or seek spiritual impoverishment for oneself if one is capable of doing more, first for oneself, then with others. While "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" in the case of both "the poor in spirit" *and* "those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness," that doesn't mean we have no basis for preferring to join one category over the other if we are fortunate enough to have a choice. The latter category clearly entails a higher level of activity in working for the good of others than does the former, whose members simply can't do more.

What makes working for righteousness higher, however, is not the superiority on the part of someone who has the possibility of making such a choice over someone who is debilitated by circumstance. It is that if one *can* reach out and help others by the pursuit of righteousness, one *should* do so

and not avoid it for selfish reasons. Likewise, it is good to be gentle — and certainly better than to mourn inconsolably, but to be gentle alone is not quite as good as to desire righteousness or to act on behalf of righteousness if one can. One should not aspire to be "pure in heart" *instead* of acting as a peacemaker if one has the capability of working to end conflict.

The categories Jesus describes sometimes come into conflict with each other. It is a strain to suppose that one can always be gentle or meek while also being an activist on behalf of righteousness. Similarly, it is easy to envision someone who is less than pure in heart acting as a peacemaker. The progressively higher level of activity described as one moves from one of the categories to the next doesn't necessarily entail incorporation of all previously specified attributes in their original form.

The character of the Beatitudes becomes clearer if we view the categories Jesus calls "blessed" in light of their opposites.

Moreover, there is no suggestion that motion can be in one direction only. One could revert to a lower level of activity. One could become less active in the pursuit of the Jesusian vision of righteousness. Indeed, at the highest level — "you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" — there is an implied warning of the danger of falling back not just a little, but to the very bottom. "Rejoice and be glad" even through persecution, Jesus instructs, because as long as you are doing so, you are reaching out to and for others in the name of righteousness. But realize this: From even the highest point in the Jesusian hierarchy of the "good person," it is but a single step to the lowest, the poor in spirit. It's the difference between bearing one's persecution gladly and breaking under its weight. And it's not necessarily within your control.

We have seen above that the character of the Beatitudes becomes clearer if we view the categories Jesus calls "blessed" in light of their opposites: the spiritually self-confident in contrast to the poor in spirit, the persecutors of those who follow the Jesus teaching in contrast to those persecuted. These opposites, too, form a hierarchy — of potential activity in opposition to the Jesusian categories of good. Here, then, is the typology of the "bad person," each stage reflecting a greater degree of activity on behalf of the old political order, which Jesus seeks to overturn: those who offer the lowest of the low only their own sense of superiority; those unmoved by or contemptuous of people suffering from great loss or adversity; those whose response when they encounter the meek and gentle is to lord it over them; those who embrace a doctrine defending their position of privilege at the expense of others; those in a position of power who show no mercy to the powerless; those corruptly seeking advantage over others; those obstructing a just peace or fomenting conflict; those who persecute people who seek what's right; those who persecute the followers of Jesus's teaching. Jesus's first message to those in any of these categories is, quite simply, stop. Stop expressing con-

tempt for others, stop promulgating strife, stop your persecution.

Accordingly, there are also worldly repercussions for individuals who exemplify these qualities of bad conduct. Those who define themselves by their sense of superiority will live in a world governed not by justice but by persecution, one in which the tables may turn on them without a moment's notice. Those who have contempt for the fellow-feeling that underlies mourning will be unmourned. Those who abuse the meek will lose their claim on a world they think is theirs. Those who defend their position of privilege at the expense of others will remain unsatisfied. Those who show no mercy will live their lives in fear of a world in which no mercy will be shown them. Those whose inner corruption drives them to seek ill-gotten advantage will find themselves mired in it, deprived of the ability to appreciate or apprehend anything that is good or pure. Those who obstruct peace will find their names reviled. Those who persecute the just will live in a world in which justice means nothing next to the arbitrary power of persecution, a power from which they will have no protection should it turn on them.

Jesus offers strict guidance for good behavior for those who find themselves in a position of privilege.

Except, of course, that the world of the "bad person" is the one to which Jesus is opposed and which he seeks to overturn. According to his prescription, the world will indeed come to be governed by justice — what's right — and not by persecution. And he offers those currently prone to the temptations of the "bad person" a chance to overcome them by embracing his teaching and stopping their own unjust conduct.

These are real-world admonitions. Anyone in a position of privilege who heard Jesus speak and thought seriously about what he had to say would find his guidance on the reform of personal conduct difficult to mistake. But whether such a person would act on these words is another question altogether.

At first glance, the main purpose of the Beatitudes seems to be to offer various consolations to the downtrodden. But while Jesus does this, he also propounds a stern standard of judgment and offers strict guidance for good behavior for those who find themselves in a position of privilege. This injunction takes the form of a warning: The days of abusive privilege are numbered. Jesus's is not merely an ethereal threat, bound up in the afterlife and a world to come, which the nonbeliever can spurn with contempt in favor of worldly enjoyment. It is a threat based on changes coming to *this world*. It is a threat dangerous to ignore in the here-and-now.

Nevertheless the question remains: Is this all to be taken literally? Come the revolution, of course, heads may roll, but surely Jesus cannot be saying that all those who enjoy privilege without righteousness are going to suffer for it in this world. Surely he is aware that some will hear all of what he has

to say, spurn it — and get away with it scot-free for the rest of their earthly lives. Moreover, there is a potential for large-scale contradiction based on misreading here: If the point is to show mercy, even those who have themselves been unmerciful should be shown mercy, should they not?

True. Jesus says that what is right, according to the Beatitudes, "shall" come to pass; he does not say when. However, the cumulative effect of the positive, stated promises of the Beatitudes and the negative, unstated repercussions for those who oppose righteousness point to a question that *will* be asked in this world about those who have come before: What side were you on? Did you defend your privileges at the expense of others or work to uplift those who found themselves downtrodden? Did you act only for yourself, or did you think of others as best you could, whenever you could? Did you run risks for what's right, or was the risk you ran that the righteous would prevail? The merciless, the persecutors, the purveyors of conflict, the defenders of privilege — Jesus's point is that they live in a world governed by fear, and he invites them to reflect on what might happen if the world turned on them and they suddenly became the ones with cause to fear.

In a world ordered according to Jesusian principles, those who have been unmerciful will be shown mercy.

But that world is not the world Jesus is promoting. In a world ordered according to Jesusian principles, there will be no persecution, even for those who have made a transition from a world in which they were persecutors. Even those who have been unmerciful will be shown mercy. Their fear of a world in which the tables are turned on them is in fact displaced fear of a more primordial — one might say existential — kind: a world that has no place for them. A world in which the attributes of privilege that they believe are essential to their being have been obliterated. A world in which they, in their conception of themselves, cannot continue to *be*. A world in which *they* must change if they are to remain. Jesus confronts the "bad person" not with something so simple — and easy to reject — as a competing model of how to live a better life. Rather, he forces a radical confrontation within the "bad person" over the very possibility of his or her continued existence.

More than that. What would the world look like if those in a position of privilege decided to comport themselves in accordance with the implicit guidance of the Beatitudes? And how, in turn, would that affect membership in the categories Jesus has described as "blessed"? The result here is most interesting.

If no one persecutes people for following the teaching of Jesus, then the category of the "persecuted" disappears. If no one persecutes those who seek righteousness, then this category, too, disappears. And if the response to the poor in spirit is not to show contempt for them but to uplift them, to encourage them to find the value in their lives that they have somehow lost

sight of, then that category, too, disappears. Thus, these three categories of the blessed for which Jesus makes promises only with regard to heaven *disappear entirely wherever the Jesusian teaching takes root on earth.* This explains why Jesus assigns no earthly reward for people in these three categories. His silence anticipates that once people follow his guidance there will be no one left in these conditions. His ambitious political agenda is to rid the world of both persecuted and persecutors — opposite sides of the coin of persecution.

In the world, we will always have among us those in mourning and the gentle; we will always have need of those who desire righteousness, of those who are merciful, of those who act out of pure intentions, and of those who seek peace. But if or when the world is organized in accordance with the principles embedded in the lives of those Jesus here deems "blessed," we will no longer have the persecuted and the unvalued, nor their persecutors and tormentors. The Jesusian political agenda is thus organized around the pursuit of righteousness by those who are able — at potential risk to their own lives — for the sake of a world in which the unvalued (including they themselves when they are persecuted) are at last fully valued as human beings.

How, then, does Jesus envision that the gentle will come to inherit the earth? Because the once-mighty, under pressure of precisely this kind, will die out as a type. They will change their minds about defending their privileges at the expense of others. And the world will be their dying bequest to the gentle.

End of Dreams, Return of History

By Robert Kagan

The world has become normal again. The years immediately following the end of the Cold War offered a tantalizing glimpse at a new kind of international order, with nations growing together or disappearing altogether, ideological conflicts melting away, cultures intermingling through increasingly free commerce and communications. But that was a mirage, the hopeful anticipation of a liberal, democratic world that wanted to believe the end of the Cold War did not end just one strategic and ideological conflict but all strategic and ideological conflict. People and their leaders longed for "a world transformed."[1] Today the nations of the West still cling to that vision. Evidence to the contrary — the turn toward autocracy in Russia or the growing military ambitions of China — is either dismissed as a temporary aberration or denied entirely.

Robert Kagan is author, most recently, of Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century *(Knopf, 2006). He is senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and senior transatlantic fellow at the German Marshall Fund. A version of this essay will appear in Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds.,* To Lead the World: American Strategy After the Bush Doctrine *(Oxford University Press, 2008).*

The world has not been transformed, however. Nations remains as strong as ever, and so too the nationalist ambitions, the passions, and the competition among nations that have shaped history. The world is still "unipolar," with the United States remaining the only superpower. But international competition among great powers has returned, with the United States, Russia, China, Europe, Japan, India, Iran, and others vying for regional predominance. Struggles for honor and status and influence in the world have once again become key features of the international scene. Ideologically, it is a time not of convergence but of divergence. The competition between liberalism and absolutism has reemerged, with the nations of the world increasingly lining up, as in the past, along ideological lines. Finally, there is the fault line between modernity and tradition, the violent struggle of Islamic fundamentalists against the modern powers and the secular cultures that, in their view, have penetrated and polluted their Islamic world.

Creating and sustaining the unipolar world

How will the United States deal with such a world? Today there is much discussion of the so-called Bush Doctrine and what may follow it. Many prefer to believe the world is in turmoil not because it is in turmoil but because Bush made it so by destroying the new hopeful era. And when Bush leaves, it can return once again to the way it was. Having glimpsed the mirage once, people naturally want to see it and believe in it again.

The first illusion, however, is that Bush really changed anything. Historians will long debate the decision to go to war in Iraq, but what they are least likely to conclude is that the intervention was wildly out of character for the United States. Since the end of World War II at least, American presidents of both parties have pursued a fairly consistent approach to the world. They have regarded the United States as the "indispensable nation"[2] and the "locomotive at the head of mankind."[3] They have amassed power and influence and deployed them in ever-widening arcs around the globe on behalf of interests, ideals, and ambitions, both tangible and intangible. Since 1945 Americans have insisted on acquiring and maintaining military supremacy, a "preponderance of power" in the world rather than a balance of power with other nations. They have operated on the ideological convic-

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[1] This was the title chosen by former President George H. W. Bush and his national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, for their account of American foreign policy at the end of the Cold War.

[2] Second Inaugural Address of William J. Clinton (January 20, 1997).

[3] Dean Acheson, quoted in Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 372.

tion that liberal democracy is the only legitimate form of government and that other forms of government are not only illegitimate but transitory. They have declared their readiness to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation" by forces of oppression, to "pay any price, bear any burden" to defend freedom, to seek "democratic enlargement" in the world, and to work for the "end of tyranny."[4] They have been impatient with the status quo. They have seen America as a catalyst for change in human affairs, and they have employed the strategies and tactics of "maximalism," seeking revolutionary rather than gradual solutions to problems. Therefore, they have often been at odds with the more cautious approaches of their allies.[5]

When people talk about a Bush Doctrine, they generally refer to three sets of principles — the idea of preemptive or preventive military action; the promotion of democracy and "regime change"; and a diplomacy tending toward "unilateralism," a willingness to act without the sanction of international bodies such as the United Nations Security Council or the unanimous approval of its allies.[6] It is worth asking not only whether past administrations acted differently but also which of these any future administration, regardless of party, would promise to abjure in its conduct of foreign policy. As scholars from Melvyn P. Leffler to John Lewis Gaddis have shown, the idea of preemptive or preventive action is hardly a novel concept in American foreign policy.[7] And as policymakers and philosophers from Henry Kissinger to Michael Walzer have agreed, it is impossible in the present era to renounce such actions *a priori*.[8] As for "regime change," there is not a single administration in the past half-century that has not attempted to engineer changes of regime in various parts of the world, from Eisenhower's CIA-inspired coups in Iran and Guatemala and his planned overthrow of Fidel Castro, which John F. Kennedy attempted to carry out, to George Herbert Walker Bush's invasion of Panama to Bill Clinton's actions in Haiti and Bosnia. And if by unilateralism we mean an unwillingness to be con-

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[4] The quotations are of course from Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush.

[5] See Stephen Sestanovich, "American Maximalism," *National Interest* (Spring 2005).

[6] Critics obviously don't mean that the Bush administration literally acts alone, since even in Iraq the United States had a number of allies. It had more partners in that war than the administration of George H.W. Bush had in its invasion of Panama and than Bill Clinton had in his intervention in Haiti. "Unilateralism" apparently is a relative term and depends for its interpretation on circumstances.

[7] Melvyn P. Leffler, "9/11 and American Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, 29:3 (June 2005); John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Harvard University Press, 2005).

[8] In Walzer's view, traditional legal arguments against preventive war look "different when the danger is posed by weapons of mass destruction, which are developed in secret, and which might be used suddenly, without warning, with catastrophic results." Not only might preventive action be "legitimate" under such circumstances, but so would "unilateral action" without a Security Council authorization. The "refusal of a U.N. majority to act forcefully" is not "a good reason for ruling out the use of force by any member state that can use it effectively." Michael Walzer, "The Hard Questions: Lone Ranger," *New Republic* (April 27, 1998). Kissinger's argument is similar. See Henry Kissinger, "Iraq Poses Most Consequential Foreign-Policy Decision for Bush," *Los Angeles Times* (August 8, 2002).

strained by the disapproval of the UN Security Council, by some of the NATO allies, by the OAS, or by any other international body, which presidents of the past allowed themselves to be so constrained?[9]

These qualities of American foreign policy reflect not one man or one party or one circle of thinkers. They spring from the nation's historical experience and are a characteristic American response to international circumstances. They are underpinned, on the one hand, by old beliefs and ambitions and, on the other hand, by power. So long as Americans elect leaders who believe it is the role of the United States to improve the world and bring about the "ultimate good,"[10] and so long as American power in all its forms is sufficient to shape the behavior of others, the broad direction of American foreign policy is unlikely to change, absent some dramatic — indeed, genuinely revolutionary — effort by a future administration.

Realist theory has assumed that other powers must inevitably band together to balance against the superpower.

These American traditions, together with historical events beyond Americans' control, have catapulted the United States to a position of pre-eminence in the world. Since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of this "unipolar" world, there has been much anticipation of the end of unipolarity and the rise of a multipolar world in which the United States is no longer the predominant power. Not only realist theorists but others both inside and outside the United States have long argued the theoretical and practical unsustainability, not to mention undesirability, of a world with only one superpower. Mainstream realist theory has assumed that other powers must inevitably band together to balance against the superpower. Others expected the post-Cold War era to be characterized by the primacy of geoeconomics over geopolitics and foresaw a multipolar world with the economic giants of Europe, India, Japan, and China rivaling the United States. Finally, in the wake of the Iraq War and with hostility to the United States, as measured in public opinion polls, apparently at an all-time high, there has been a widespread assumption that the American position in the world must finally be eroding.

Yet American predominance in the main categories of power persists as a key feature of the international system. The enormous and productive American economy remains at the center of the international economic sys-

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[9] To review the behavior of the most recent administrations: The Reagan administration sought no international authorization for its covert war against the Sandinistas or its arming of guerrillas in Angola and Afghanistan, and it sought neither UN nor OAS support for the invasion of Grenada. The first Bush administration invaded Panama without UN authorization and would have gone to war with Iraq without authorization if Russia had vetoed. The Clinton administration intervened in Haiti without UN authorization, bombed Iraq over the objection of UN Security Council permanent members, and went to war in Kosovo without UN authorization.

[10] Remarks of Senator Barack Obama to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs (April 23, 2007).

tem. American democratic principles are shared by over a hundred nations. The American military is not only the largest but the only one capable of projecting force into distant theaters. Chinese strategists, who spend a great deal of time thinking about these things, see the world not as multipolar but as characterized by "one superpower, many great powers," and this configuration seems likely to persist into the future absent either a catastrophic blow to American power or a decision by the United States to diminish its power and international influence voluntarily.[11]

The anticipated global balancing has for the most part not occurred. Russia and China certainly share a common and openly expressed goal of checking American hegemony. They have created at least one institution, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, aimed at resisting American influence in Central Asia, and China is the only power in the world, other than the United States, engaged in a long-term military buildup. But Sino-Russian hostility to American predominance has not yet produced a concerted and cooperative effort at balancing. China's buildup is driven at least as much by its own long-term ambitions as by a desire to balance the United States. Russia has been using its vast reserves of oil and natural gas as a lever to compensate for the lack of military power, but it either cannot or does not want to increase its military capability sufficiently to begin counterbalancing the United States. Overall, Russian military power remains in decline. In addition, the two powers do not trust one another. They are traditional rivals, and the rise of China inspires at least as much nervousness in Russia as it does in the United States. At the moment, moreover, China is less abrasively confrontational with the United States. Its dependence on the American market and foreign investment and its perception that the United States remains a potentially formidable adversary mitigate against an openly confrontational approach.

Sino-Russian hostility to American predominance has not yet produced a concerted effort at balancing.

In any case, China and Russia cannot balance the United States without at least some help from Europe, Japan, India, or at least some of the other advanced, democratic nations. But those powerful players are not joining the effort. Europe has rejected the option of making itself a counterweight to American power. This is true even among the older members of the European Union, where neither France, Germany, Italy, nor Spain proposes such counterbalancing, despite a public opinion hostile to the Bush administration. Now that the EU has expanded to include the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, who fear threats from the east, not from the west, the prospect of a unified Europe counterbalancing the United States is practical-

[11] Rosalie Chen, "China Perceives America: Perspectives of International Relations Experts," *Journal of Contemporary China* 12:35 (May 2003).

ly nil. As for Japan and India, the clear trend in recent years has been toward closer strategic cooperation with the United States.

If anything, the most notable balancing over the past decade has been aimed not at the American superpower but at the two large powers: China and Russia. In Asia and the Pacific, Japan, Australia, and even South Korea and the nations of Southeast Asia have all engaged in "hedging" against a rising China. This has led them to seek closer relations with Washington, especially in the case of Japan and Australia. India has also drawn closer to the United States and is clearly engaged in balancing against China. Russia's efforts to increase its influence over what it regards as its "near abroad," meanwhile, have produced tensions and negative reactions in the Baltics and other parts of Eastern Europe. Because these nations are now members of the European Union, this has also complicated EU-Russian relations. On balance, traditional allies of the United States in East Asia and in Europe, while their publics may be more anti-American than in the past, nevertheless pursue policies that reflect more concern about the powerful states in their midst than about the United States.[12] This has provided a cushion against hostile public opinion and offers a foundation on which to strengthen American relations with these countries after the departure of Bush.

As for Russia and China, their hostility to the United States predates the Iraq War and, indeed, the Bush administration.

The Iraq War has not had the effect expected by many. Although there are reasonable-sounding theories as to why America's position should be eroding as a result of global opposition to the war and the unpopularity of the current administration, there has been little measurable change in the actual policies of nations, other than their reluctance to assist the United States in Iraq. In 2003 those who claimed the U.S. global position was eroding pointed to electoral results in some friendly countries: the election of Schröder in Germany, the defeat of Aznar's party in Spain, and the election of Lula in Brazil.[13] But if elections are the test, other more recent votes around the world have put relatively pro-American leaders in power in Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, Canberra, and Ottawa. As for Russia and China, their hostility to the United States predates the Iraq War and, indeed, the Bush administration. Russia turned most sharply anti-American in the late 1990s partly as a consequence of NATO enlargement. Both were far more upset and angered by the American intervention in Kosovo than by the invasion of Iraq. Both began complaining

[12] This is what William Wohlforth predicted almost a decade ago. See William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24:1 (Summer 1999).

[13] See, for instance, G. John Ikenberry, "Strategic Reactions to American Preeminence: Great Power Politics in the Age of Unipolarity," working group paper prepared for the National Intelligence Council (July 2003).

about American hegemonism and unilateralism and calling for a multipolar order during the Clinton years. Chinese rhetoric has been, if anything, more tempered during the Bush years, in part because the Chinese have seen September 11 and American preoccupation with terrorism as a welcome distraction from America's other preoccupation, the "China threat."

The world's failure to balance against the superpower is the more striking because the United States, notwithstanding its difficult interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, continues to expand its power and military reach and shows no sign of slowing this expansion even after the 2008 elections. The American defense budget has surpassed $500 billion per year, not including supplemental spending totaling over $100 billion on Iraq and Afghanistan. This level of spending is sustainable, moreover, both economically and politically.[14] As the American military budget rises, so does the number of overseas American military bases. Since September 11, 2001, the United States has built or expanded bases in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asia; in Bulgaria, Georgia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania in Europe; and in the Philippines, Djibouti, Oman, and Qatar. Two decades ago, hostility to the American military presence began forcing the United States out of the Philippines and seemed to be undermining support for American bases in Japan. Today, the Philippines is rethinking that decision, and the furor in Japan has subsided. In places like South Korea and Germany, it is American plans to reduce the U.S. military presence that stir controversy, not what one would expect if there was a widespread fear or hatred of overweening American power. Overall, there is no shortage of other countries willing to host U.S. forces, a good indication that much of the world continues to tolerate and even lend support to American geopolitical primacy if only as a protection against more worrying foes.[15]

Predominance is not the same thing as omnipotence. Just because the United States has more power than everyone else does not mean it can impose its will on everyone else. American predominance in the early years after the Second World War did not prevent the North Korean invasion of the South, a communist victory in China, the Soviet acquisition of the hydrogen bomb, or the consolidation of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe — all far greater strategic setbacks than anything the United States has yet suffered or is likely to suffer in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nor does predominance mean the United States will succeed in all its endeavors, any

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[14] American defense spending remains historically low as a percentage of GDP, at about 4 percent. In the Reagan years, it reached nearly 8 percent. During the early years of the Cold War, it was well over 15 percent. Nor is the size of the defense budget a political issue, even among Democrats. Both Barack Obama nd Hillary Clinton currently call for increases in the size of U.S. ground forces, for instance — a huge additional expense.

[15] For the most thorough discussion of worldwide trends that run counter to the prediction of balancing, see Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting For Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," *International Security* 30:1 (Summer 2005).

more than it did six decades ago.

By the same token, foreign policy failures do not necessarily undermine predominance. Some have suggested that failure in Iraq would mean the end of predominance and unipolarity. But a superpower can lose a war — in Vietnam or in Iraq — without ceasing to be a superpower if the fundamental international conditions continue to support its predominance. So long as the United States remains at the center of the international economy and the predominant military power, so long as the American public continues to support American predominance as it has consistently for six decades, and so long as potential challengers inspire more fear than sympathy among their neighbors, the structure of the international system should remain as the Chinese describe it: one superpower and many great powers.

This is a good thing, and it should continue to be a primary goal of American foreign policy to perpetuate this relatively benign international configuration of power. The unipolar order with the United States as the predominant power is unavoidably riddled with flaws and contradictions. It inspires fears and jealousies. The United States is not immune to error, like all other nations, and because of its size and importance in the international system those errors are magnified and take on greater significance than the errors of less powerful nations. Compared to the ideal Kantian international order, in which all the world's powers would be peace-loving equals, conducting themselves wisely, prudently, and in strict obeisance to international law, the unipolar system is both dangerous and unjust. Compared to any plausible alternative in the real world, however, it is relatively stable and less likely to produce a major war between great powers. It is also comparatively benevolent, from a liberal perspective, for it is more conducive to the principles of economic and political liberalism that Americans and many others value.

American predominance does not stand in the way of progress toward a better world, therefore. It stands in the way of regression toward a more dangerous world. The choice is not between an American-dominated order and a world that looks like the European Union. The future international order will be shaped by those who have the power to shape it. The leaders of a post-American world will not meet in Brussels but in Beijing, Moscow, and Washington.

The return of great powers and great games

If the world is marked by the persistence of unipolarity, it is nevertheless also being shaped by the reemergence of competitive national ambitions of the kind that have shaped human affairs from time immemorial. During the Cold War, this historical tendency of great powers

to jostle with one another for status and influence as well as for wealth and power was largely suppressed by the two superpowers and their rigid bipolar order. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has not been powerful enough, and probably could never be powerful enough, to suppress by itself the normal ambitions of nations. This does not mean the world has returned to multipolarity, since none of the large powers is in range of competing with the superpower for global influence. Nevertheless, several large powers are now competing for regional predominance, both with the United States and with each other.

National ambition drives China's foreign policy today, and although it is tempered by prudence and the desire to appear as unthreatening as possible to the rest of the world, the Chinese are powerfully motivated to return their nation to what they regard as its traditional position as the preeminent power in East Asia. They do not share a European, postmodern view that power is passé; hence their now two-decades-long military buildup and modernization. Like the Americans, they believe power, including military power, is a good thing to have and that it is better to have more of it than less. Perhaps more significant is the Chinese perception, also shared by Americans, that status and honor, and not just wealth and security, are important for a nation.

The Chinese do not share the view that power is passé; hence their now two-decades-long military buildup.

Japan, meanwhile, which in the past could have been counted as an aspiring postmodern power — with its pacifist constitution and low defense spending — now appears embarked on a more traditional national course. Partly this is in reaction to the rising power of China and concerns about North Korea's nuclear weapons. But it is also driven by Japan's own national ambition to be a leader in East Asia or at least not to play second fiddle or "little brother" to China. China and Japan are now in a competitive quest with each trying to augment its own status and power and to prevent the other's rise to predominance, and this competition has a military and strategic as well as an economic and political component. Their competition is such that a nation like South Korea, with a long unhappy history as a pawn between the two powers, is once again worrying both about a "greater China" and about the return of Japanese nationalism. As Aaron Friedberg commented, the East Asian future looks more like Europe's past than its present. But it also looks like Asia's past.

Russian foreign policy, too, looks more like something from the nineteenth century. It is being driven by a typical, and typically Russian, blend of national resentment and ambition. A postmodern Russia simply seeking integration into the new European order, the Russia of Andrei Kozyrev, would not be troubled by the eastward enlargement of the EU and NATO, would not insist on predominant influence over its "near abroad," and would not use its natural resources as means of gaining geopolitical leverage

and enhancing Russia's international status in an attempt to regain the lost glories of the Soviet empire and Peter the Great. But Russia, like China and Japan, is moved by more traditional great-power considerations, including the pursuit of those valuable if intangible national interests: honor and respect. Although Russian leaders complain about threats to their security from NATO and the United States, the Russian sense of insecurity has more to do with resentment and national identity than with plausible external military threats.[16] Russia's complaint today is not with this or that weapons system. It is the entire post-Cold War settlement of the 1990s that Russia resents and wants to revise. But that does not make insecurity less a factor in Russia's relations with the world; indeed, it makes finding compromise with the Russians all the more difficult.

One could add others to this list of great powers with traditional rather than postmodern aspirations. India's regional ambitions are more muted, or are focused most intently on Pakistan, but it is clearly engaged in competition with China for dominance in the Indian Ocean and sees itself, correctly, as an emerging great power on the world scene. In the Middle East there is Iran, which mingles religious fervor with a historical sense of superiority and leadership in its region.[17] Its nuclear program is as much about the desire for regional hegemony as about defending Iranian territory from attack by the United States.

Even the European Union, in its way, expresses a pan-European national ambition to play a significant role in the world, and it has become the vehicle for channeling German, French, and British ambitions in what Europeans regard as a safe supranational direction. Europeans seek honor and respect, too, but of a postmodern variety. The honor they seek is to occupy the moral high ground in the world, to exercise moral authority, to wield political and economic influence as an antidote to militarism, to be the keeper of the global conscience, and to be recognized and admired by others for playing this role.

Islam is not a nation, but many Muslims express a kind of religious nationalism, and the leaders of radical Islam, including al Qaeda, do seek to establish a theocratic nation or confederation of nations that would encompass a wide swath of the Middle East and beyond. Like national movements elsewhere, Islamists have a yearning for respect, including self-respect, and a

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16 A recent editorial in the *Economist* ("Pining for the Cold War," May 14, 2007) artfully provides the view of the world as seen from Moscow, that "Russia is a strong, sovereign and prosperous country, surrounded by enemies and traitors who are bent on undermining its geopolitical power. Upstarts such as Estonia and Poland are trying to spoil Russia's far more important relationships with proper European countries, such as Germany or France. The freshly-baked European Union (EU) members act on the instructions of America, a hypocritical and arrogant dictator of the world order, which pretends to be a democracy but in fact is closer to the Third Reich."

17 "Whether the U.S. likes it or not, Iran is a major regional power with great political and spiritual influence. It is in the United States' interests to accept Iran's influence as a reality, though it may be a bitter pill to swallow, and to stop leveling accusations against the Islamic Republic based on prejudices." *Tehran Times* (May 15, 2007).

desire for honor. Their national identity has been molded in defiance against stronger and often oppressive outside powers, and also by memories of ancient superiority over those same powers. China had its "century of humiliation." Islamists have more than a century of humiliation to look back on, a humiliation of which Israel has become the living symbol, which is partly why even Muslims who are neither radical nor fundamentalist proffer their sympathy and even their support to violent extremists who can turn the tables on the dominant liberal West, and particularly on a dominant America which implanted and still feeds the Israeli cancer in their midst.

Finally, there is the United States itself. As a matter of national policy stretching back across numerous administrations, Democratic and Republican, liberal and conservative, Americans have insisted on preserving regional predominance in East Asia; the Middle East; the Western Hemisphere; until recently, Europe; and now, increasingly, Central Asia. This was its goal after the Second World War, and since the end of the Cold War, beginning with the first Bush administration and continuing through the Clinton years, the United States did not retract but expanded its influence eastward across Europe and into the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Even as it maintains its position as the predominant global power, it is also engaged in hegemonic competitions in these regions with China in East and Central Asia, with Iran in the Middle East and Central Asia, and with Russia in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. The United States, too, is more of a traditional than a postmodern power, and though Americans are loath to acknowledge it, they generally prefer their global place as "No. 1" and are equally loath to relinquish it. Once having entered a region, whether for practical or idealistic reasons, they are remarkably slow to withdraw from it until they believe they have substantially transformed it in their own image. They profess indifference to the world and claim they just want to be left alone even as they seek daily to shape the behavior of billions of people around the globe.

Islamists have more than a century of humiliation to look back on. Israel has become its living symbol.

The jostling for status and influence among these ambitious nations and would-be nations is a second defining feature of the new post-Cold War international system. Nationalism in all its forms is back, if it ever went away, and so is international competition for power, influence, honor, and status. American predominance prevents these rivalries from intensifying — its regional as well as its global predominance. Were the United States to diminish its influence in the regions where it is currently the strongest power, the other nations would settle disputes as great and lesser powers have done in the past: sometimes through diplomacy and accommodation but often through confrontation and wars of varying scope, intensity, and destructiveness. One novel aspect of such a multipolar world is that most of these pow-

ers would possess nuclear weapons. That could make wars between them less likely, or it could simply make them more catastrophic.

It is easy but also dangerous to underestimate the role the United States plays in providing a measure of stability in the world even as it also disrupts stability. For instance, the United States is the dominant naval power everywhere, such that other nations cannot compete with it even in their home waters. They either happily or grudgingly allow the United States Navy to be the guarantor of international waterways and trade routes, of international access to markets and raw materials such as oil. Even when the United States engages in a war, it is able to play its role as guardian of the waterways. In a more genuinely multipolar world, however, it would not. Nations would compete for naval dominance at least in their own regions and possibly beyond. Conflict between nations would involve struggles on the oceans as well as on land. Armed embargos, of the kind used in World War I and other major conflicts, would disrupt trade flows in a way that is now impossible.

Such order as exists in the world rests not only on the goodwill of peoples but also on American power.

Such order as exists in the world rests not merely on the goodwill of peoples but on a foundation provided by American power. Even the European Union, that great geopolitical miracle, owes its founding to American power, for without it the European nations after World War II would never have felt secure enough to reintegrate Germany. Most Europeans recoil at the thought, but even today Europe's stability depends on the guarantee, however distant and one hopes unnecessary, that the United States could step in to check any dangerous development on the continent. In a genuinely multipolar world, that would not be possible without renewing the danger of world war.

People who believe greater equality among nations would be preferable to the present American predominance often succumb to a basic logical fallacy. They believe the order the world enjoys today exists independently of American power. They imagine that in a world where American power was diminished, the aspects of international order that they like would remain in place. But that's not the way it works. International order does not rest on ideas and institutions. It is shaped by configurations of power. The international order we know today reflects the distribution of power in the world since World War II, and especially since the end of the Cold War. A different configuration of power, a multipolar world in which the poles were Russia, China, the United States, India, and Europe, would produce its own kind of order, with different rules and norms reflecting the interests of the powerful states that would have a hand in shaping it. Would that international order be an improvement? Perhaps for Beijing and Moscow it would. But it is doubtful that it would suit the tastes of enlightenment liber-

als in the United States and Europe.

The current order, of course, is not only far from perfect but also offers no guarantee against major conflict among the world's great powers. Even under the umbrella of unipolarity, regional conflicts involving the large powers may erupt. War could erupt between China and Taiwan and draw in both the United States and Japan. War could erupt between Russia and Georgia, forcing the United States and its European allies to decide whether to intervene or suffer the consequences of a Russian victory. Conflict between India and Pakistan remains possible, as does conflict between Iran and Israel or other Middle Eastern states. These, too, could draw in other great powers, including the United States.

Such conflicts may be unavoidable no matter what policies the United States pursues. But they are more likely to erupt if the United States weakens or withdraws from its positions of regional dominance. This is especially true in East Asia, where most nations agree that a reliable American power has a stabilizing and pacific effect on the region. That is certainly the view of most of China's neighbors. But even China, which seeks gradually to supplant the United States as the dominant power in the region, faces the dilemma that an American withdrawal could unleash an ambitious, independent, nationalist Japan.

Conflicts are more likely to erupt if the United States withdraws from its positions of regional dominance.

In Europe, too, the departure of the United States from the scene — even if it remained the world's most powerful nation — could be destabilizing. It could tempt Russia to an even more overbearing and potentially forceful approach to unruly nations on its periphery. Although some realist theorists seem to imagine that the disappearance of the Soviet Union put an end to the possibility of confrontation between Russia and the West, and therefore to the need for a permanent American role in Europe, history suggests that conflicts in Europe involving Russia are possible even without Soviet communism. If the United States withdrew from Europe — if it adopted what some call a strategy of "offshore balancing" — this could in time increase the likelihood of conflict involving Russia and its near neighbors, which could in turn draw the United States back in under unfavorable circumstances.

It is also optimistic to imagine that a retrenchment of the American position in the Middle East and the assumption of a more passive, "offshore" role would lead to greater stability there. The vital interest the United States has in access to oil and the role it plays in keeping access open to other nations in Europe and Asia make it unlikely that American leaders could or would stand back and hope for the best while the powers in the region battle it out. Nor would a more "even-handed" policy toward Israel, which some see as the magic key to unlocking peace, stability, and comity in the

Middle East, obviate the need to come to Israel's aid if its security became threatened. That commitment, paired with the American commitment to protect strategic oil supplies for most of the world, practically ensures a heavy American military presence in the region, both on the seas and on the ground.

The subtraction of American power from any region would not end conflict but would simply change the equation. In the Middle East, competition for influence among powers both inside and outside the region has raged for at least two centuries. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism doesn't change this. It only adds a new and more threatening dimension to the competition, which neither a sudden end to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians nor an immediate American withdrawal from Iraq would change. The alternative to American predominance in the region is not balance and peace. It is further competition. The region and the states within it remain relatively weak. A diminution of American influence would not be followed by a diminution of other external influences. One could expect deeper involvement by both China and Russia, if only to secure their interests.[18] And one could also expect the more powerful states of the region, particularly Iran, to expand and fill the vacuum. It is doubtful that any American administration would voluntarily take actions that could shift the balance of power in the Middle East further toward Russia, China, or Iran. The world hasn't changed that much. An American withdrawal from Iraq will not return things to "normal" or to a new kind of stability in the region. It will produce a new instability, one likely to draw the United States back in again.

The alternative to American regional predominance in the Middle East and elsewhere is not a new regional stability. In an era of burgeoning nationalism, the future is likely to be one of intensified competition among nations and nationalist movements. Difficult as it may be to extend American predominance into the future, no one should imagine that a reduction of American power or a retraction of American influence and global involvement will provide an easier path.

Liberalism and autocracy

COMPLICATING THE EQUATION and adding to the stakes is that the return to the international competition of ambitious nations has been accompanied by a return to global ideological competition. More precisely, the two-centuries-old struggle between political liberalism and autocracy has reemerged as a third defining characteristic of the present era.

The Cold War may have caused us to forget that the more enduring ideo-

[18] It would be pleasant to imagine deeper European involvement as well. But that seems unlikely, given Europe's general weakness and its internal problems with Islam.

logical conflict since the Enlightenment has not been between capitalism and communism but between liberalism and autocracy. That was the issue that divided the United States from much of Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and it divided Europe itself through much of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The assumption that the death of communism would bring an end to disagreements about the proper form of government and society seemed more plausible in the 1990s, when both Russia and China were thought to be moving toward political as well as economic liberalism. Such a development would have produced a remarkable ideological convergence among all the great powers of the world and heralded a genuinely new era in human development.

But those expectations have proved misplaced. China has not liberalized but has shored up its autocratic government. Russia has turned away from imperfect liberalism decisively toward autocracy. Of the world's great powers today, therefore, two of the largest, with over a billion and a half people, have governments that are committed to autocratic rule and seem to have the ability to sustain themselves in power for the foreseeable future with apparent popular approval.

Beijing and Moscow believe autocracy is better than democracy and essential to prevent chaos and collapse.

Many assume that Russian and Chinese leaders do not believe in anything, and therefore they cannot be said to represent an ideology, but that is mistaken. The rulers of China and Russia do have a set of beliefs that guide them in both domestic and foreign policy. They believe autocracy is better for their nations than democracy. They believe it offers order and stability and the possibility of prosperity. They believe that for their large, fractious nations, a strong government is essential to prevent chaos and collapse. They believe democracy is not the answer and that they are serving the best interests of their peoples by holding and wielding power the way they do. This is not a novel or, from a historical perspective, even a disreputable idea. The European monarchies of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were thoroughly convinced of the superiority of their form of government. They disdained democracy as the rule of the licentious and greedy mob. Only in the past half-century has liberalism gained widespread popularity around the world, and even today some American thinkers exalt "liberal autocracy" over what they, too, disdain as "illiberal democracy." If two of the world's largest powers share a common commitment to autocratic government, autocracy is not dead as an ideology. The autocratic tradition has a long and distinguished past, and it is not as obvious as it once seemed that it has no future.

The foreign policies of such states necessarily reflect the nature and interests of their governments. In the age of monarchy, foreign policy served the interests of the monarchy. In the age of religious conflict, it served the inter-

ests of the church. In the modern era, democracies have pursued foreign policies to make the world safe for democracy. And autocracies pursue foreign policies aimed at making the world safe, if not for all autocracies, at least for their own continued rule. Today the competition between them, along with the struggle of radical Islamists to make the world safe for their vision of Islamic theocracy, has become a defining feature of the international scene.

The differences between the two camps appear on many issues of lesser strategic importance — China's willingness to provide economic and political support to certain African dictatorships that liberal governments in Europe and the United States find odious, for instance. But they are also shaping international relations at a more fundamental level. Contrary to expectations at the end of the Cold War, the question of "regime" or "polity" is once again becoming a main subject of international relations.

To ask one dictatorship to aid in the undermining of another dictatorship is asking a great deal.

The world looks very different from Moscow and Beijing than it does from Washington, London, Berlin, and Paris. In Europe and the United States, the liberal world cheered on the "color revolutions" in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan and saw in them the natural unfolding of humanity's proper political evolution. In Russia and China, these events were viewed as Western-funded, CIA-inspired coups that furthered the geopolitical hegemony of America and its (subservient) European allies. The two autocratic powers responded similarly to NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, and not only because China's embassy was bombed by an American warplane and Russia's slavic orthodox allies in Serbia were on the receiving end of the NATO onslaught. What the liberal "West" considered a moral act, a "humanitarian" intervention, leaders and analysts in Moscow and Beijing saw as unlawful and self-interested aggression. Indeed, since they do not share the liberal West's liberalism, how could they have seen it any other way?

What is more, the allied intervention in Kosovo *was* unlawful, at least according to centuries of international law and the UN Charter. It was undertaken without authorization by the UN Security Council and against a sovereign nation that had committed no act of aggression beyond its borders. Americans and Europeans went to war in service of what they regarded as a "higher law" of liberal morality. For those who do not share this liberal morality, however, such acts are merely lawless, destructive of the traditional safeguards of national sovereignty.

Of course, it is precisely toward a less rigid conception of national sovereignty that the liberal world of Europe and the United States would like to go. It is their conception of progress and a beneficial evolution of international legal principles. Ideas that are becoming common currency in Europe and the United States — limited sovereignty, "the responsibility to protect,"

a "voluntary sovereignty waiver" — all aim to provide liberal nations the right to intervene in the affairs of nonliberal nations. The Chinese and Russians and the leaders of other autocracies cannot welcome this kind of progress. Nor is it surprising that China and Russia have become the world's leading defenders of the Westphalian order of states, with its insistence upon the inviolable sovereign equality of all nations.

This is more than a dispute over the niceties of international law. It concerns the fundamental legitimacy of governments, which at the end of the day is a matter of life and death. Autocrats can hardly be expected to aid in legitimizing an evolution in the international system toward "limited sovereignty" and "the responsibility to protect." For even if the people and governments pushing this evolution do not believe they are establishing the predicate for international interventions against Russia and China, the leaders of those nations have no choice but to contemplate the possibility and to try to shield themselves. China, after all, has been a victim of international sanctions imposed by the U.S.-led liberal world, and for killing far fewer people than the governments of Sudan or Zimbabwe. Nor do China's rulers forget that if the liberal world had had its way in 1989, they would now be out of office, probably imprisoned, possibly dead.

Because autocratic governments have a vital interest in disputing liberal principles of interventionism, they will often resist efforts by the liberal international community to put pressure on other autocracies around the world. Many in the United States and Europe have begun to complain about Chinese policies that provide unfettered aid to dictatorships in Africa and Asia, thereby undermining American and European efforts to press for reforms in countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma. To ask one dictatorship to aid in the undermining of another dictatorship, however, is asking a great deal. Chinese leaders will always be extremely reluctant to impose sanctions on autocrats when they themselves remain subject to sanctions for their own autocratic behavior. They may bend occasionally so as to avoid too-close association with what the West calls "rogue regimes." But the thrust of their foreign policy will be to support an international order that places a high value on national sovereignty.

Neither Russia nor China has any interest in assisting liberal nations in their crusade against autocracies around the world. Moreover, they can see their comparative advantage over the West when it comes to gaining influence with African, Asian, or Latin American governments that can provide access to oil and other vital natural resources or that, in the case of Burma, are strategically located. Moscow knows it can have more influence with governments in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan because, unlike the liberal West, it can unreservedly support their regimes. And the more autocracies there are in the world, the less isolated Beijing and Moscow will be in international forums such as the United Nations. The more dictatorships there are, the more global resistance they will offer against the liberal West's efforts to place limits on sovereignty in the interest of advancing liberalism.

The general effect of the rise of these two large autocratic powers, therefore, will be to increase the likelihood that autocracy will spread in some parts of the world. This is not because Russia and China are evangelists for autocracy or want to set off a worldwide autocratic revolution. It is not the Cold War redux. It is more like the nineteenth century redux. Then, the absolutist rulers of Russia and Austria shored up fellow autocracies — in France, for instance — and used force to suppress liberal movements in Germany, Italy, Poland, and Spain. China and Russia may not go that far, at least not yet. But Ukraine has already been a battleground between forces supported by the liberal West and forces supported by Russia. The great-power autocracies will inevitably offer support and friendship to those who feel besieged by the United States and other liberal nations. This in itself will strengthen the hand of autocracy in the world. Autocrats and would-be autocrats will know they can again find powerful allies and patrons, something that was not as true in the 1990s.

Through the 1980s and 1990s dictatorships of both right and left fell before the liberal tide.

Moreover, China and (to a much lesser extent) Russia provide a model for successful autocracy, a way to create wealth and stability without political liberalization. This is hardly novel, of course. Hugo Chavez did not need China to show him the possibilities of successful autocracy, least of all in Latin America. In the 1970s, autocratic regimes such as Pinochet's Chile, the shah's Iran, and Suharto's Indonesia also demonstrated that economic success could come without political liberalization. But through the 1980s and 1990s the autocratic model seemed less attractive as dictatorships of both right and left fell before the liberal tide. That tide has not yet turned in the other direction, but the future may bring a return to a global competition between different forms of government, with the world's great powers on opposite sides.

This has implications for international institutions and for American foreign policy. It is no longer possible to speak of an "international community." The term suggests agreement on international norms of behavior, an international morality, even an international conscience. The idea of such a community took hold in the 1990s, at a time when the general assumption was that the movement of Russia and China toward western liberalism was producing a global commonality of thinking about human affairs. But by the late 1990s it was already clear that the international community lacked a foundation of common understanding. This was exposed most blatantly in the war over Kosovo, which divided the liberal West from both Russia and China and from many other non-European nations. Today it is apparent on the issue of Sudan and Darfur. In the future, incidents that expose the hollowness of the term "international community" will likely proliferate.

As for the United Nations Security Council, after a brief awakening from

the Cold War coma, it has fallen back to its former condition of near-paralysis. The agile diplomacy of France and the tactical caution of China have at times obscured the fact that the Security Council on most major issues is clearly divided between the autocracies and the democracies, with the latter systematically pressing for sanctions and other punitive actions against Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and other autocracies and the former just as systematically resisting and attempting to weaken the effect of such actions. This is a rut that is likely to deepen in the coming years. It will hinder, as it has already hindered, international efforts to provide assistance in humanitarian crises such as Darfur. It will also obstruct American and allied efforts to impose pressure and punishments on nations seeking nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, as it has already done in the cases of Iran and North Korea.

The problem goes beyond the Security Council. Efforts to achieve any international consensus in any forum are going to be more and more difficult because of the widening gap between liberal and autocratic governments. The current divisions between the United States and its European allies that have garnered so much attention in recent years are going to be overtaken by more fundamental ideological divisions, and especially by growing tensions between the democratic transatlantic alliance and Russia.

Today there is little sense of common political principle and shared morality among the great powers.

The divisions will be all the sharper where ideological fault lines coincide with those caused by competitive national ambitions. It may be largely accidental that two of the world's more nationalistic powers are also the two leading autocracies, but this fact will have immense geopolitical significance.

Under these circumstances, calls for a new "concert" of nations in which Russia, China, the United States, Europe, and other great powers operate under some kind of international condominium are unlikely to succeed. The early nineteenth-century "concert of Europe" operated under the umbrella of a common morality and shared principles of government. It aimed not only at the preservation of a European peace but also, and more importantly, at the maintenance of a monarchical and aristocratic order against the liberal and radical challenges presented by the French and American revolutions and their echoes elsewhere in Europe. The concert gradually broke down under the strains of popular nationalism, fueled in part by the rise of liberalism.

Today there is little sense of shared morality and common political principle among the great powers. Quite the contrary: There is suspicion, growing hostility, and the well-grounded view on the part of the autocracies that the democracies, whatever they say, would welcome their overthrow. Any concert among them would be built on a shaky foundation likely to collapse at the first serious test.

American foreign policy should be attuned to these ideological distinctions and recognize their relevance to the most important strategic questions. It is folly to expect China to help undermine a brutal regime in Khartoum or to be surprised if Russia rattles its saber at pro-Western democratic governments near its borders. There will be a tendency toward solidarity among the world's autocracies, as well as among the world's democracies.

For all these reasons, the United States should pursue policies designed both to promote democracy and to strengthen cooperation among the democracies. It should join with other democracies to erect new international institutions that both reflect and enhance their shared principles and goals. One possibility might be to establish a global concert or league of democratic states, perhaps informally at first but with the aim of holding regular meetings and consultations on the issues of the day. Such an institution could bring together Asian nations such as Japan, Australia, and India with the European nations — two sets of democracies that have comparatively little to do with each other outside the realms of trade and finance. The institution would complement, not replace, the United Nations, the G-8, and other global forums. But it would at the very least signal a commitment to the democratic idea, and in time it could become a means of pooling the resources of democratic nations to address a number of issues that cannot be addressed at the United Nations. If successful, it could come to be an organization capable of bestowing legitimacy on actions that liberal nations deem necessary but autocratic nations refuse to countenance — as NATO conferred legitimacy on the conflict in Kosovo even though Russia was opposed.

The emphasis on democracy, liberalism, and human rights exposes the weaknesses of the autocratic powers.

Some will claim that such an organization will only create divisions in the world. But those divisions are already there. The question now is whether there is any way to pursue American interests and liberal democratic ends despite them.

Others will worry that European democracies are either unwilling or unable to share the burden in pursuing common goals with the United States. That may be true. But there is still reason to hope that an effort to reinvigorate democratic solidarity may increase European willingness to take on such burdens, especially when it coincides with the increasingly autocratic and belligerent behavior of Russia and the continuing rise of autocratic China.

In such an international environment the United States should continue, as it has in the past, to prefer democracy over autocracy and to use its influence to promote the former when opportunities arise. This is more than just a matter of moral preference, although Americans often cannot avoid expressing and acting on that preference. But in a world where autocracies

increasingly look for allies in fellow autocracies, the democracies will want to do the same. The United States should discourage moves toward autocracy in democratic nations, both by punishing steps that undo democratic institutions and by providing support to those institutions and individuals who favor democratic principles. It should isolate autocratic governments when possible while encouraging internal pressure for democratic reform. History suggests that external influences, especially by the global superpower, have a positive if not determinative influence on the political course nations take. The United States should express support for democracy in word and deed without expecting immediate success. It should support the development of liberal institutions and practices, understanding that elections alone do not guarantee a steady liberal democratic course. But neither should Americans lose sight of the centrality of free and fair elections for both democracy and true liberalism.

Americans, said Dean Acheson, "are children of freedom" and "cannot be safe except in an environment of freedom."

The United States need not engage in a blind crusade on behalf of democracy everywhere at all times, nor need it seek a violent confrontation with the autocratic powers. For one thing, all the world's great powers share some important common interests, especially in the economic realm. Nor can an intelligent foreign policy ever be guided solely by one set of principles. Promoting democracy cannot and should not be the only goal of American foreign policy, any more than can producing wealth, fighting terrorism, preventing the spread of nuclear weapons, or any other national goal or ambition. There will be times when promoting democracy will have to take a back seat to other objectives. The job of statesmen is to determine when. But democracy should be as highly valued as the others, for it is, like them, of strategic importance. As the hard-headed Dean Acheson put it, Americans "are children of freedom" and "cannot be safe except in an environment of freedom."[19]

The emphasis on democracy, liberalism, and human rights has strategic relevance in part because it plays to American strengths and exposes the weaknesses of the autocratic powers. It is easy to look at China and Russia today and believe they are simply getting stronger and stronger. But one should not overlook their fragility. These autocratic regimes may be stronger than they were in the past in terms of wealth and global influence. But they do still live in a predominantly liberal era. That means they face an unavoidable problem of legitimacy. They are not like the autocracies of nineteenth-century Europe, which still enjoyed a historical legitimacy derived partly from the fact that the world had known nothing but autocracy for centuries.

[19] Beisner, *Acheson*, 152.

To be an autocrat today is to be constantly concerned that the powerful forces of liberalism, backed by a collection of rich, advanced nations, including the world's only superpower, will erode or undermine the controls necessary to stay in power. Today's autocracies struggle to create a new kind of legitimacy, and it is no easy task. The Chinese leaders race forward with their economy in fear that any slowing will be their undoing. They fitfully stamp out signs of political opposition partly because they live in fear of repeating the Soviet experience. Having watched the Soviet Union succumb to the liberal West, thanks to what they regard as Mikhail Gorbachev's weakness and mistakes, they are determined neither to show weakness nor to make the same mistakes.

China's leaders fitfully stamp out signs of political opposition, living in fear of repeating the Soviet experience.

Vladimir Putin shares both their contempt for Gorbachev and their commitment to the lessons learned from his downfall. In a nice historical irony, the Russian leader, in order to avoid a Russian dénouement, is trying to adopt a Chinese model of modern autocracy, using oil and gas wealth instead of entrepreneurship to buy off the Russian elite as he consolidates power in the name of stability and nationalism. In both countries, the renewed international competition among ambitious nations is helpful in this respect. It allows the governments to charge dissidents and would-be democrats as fifth-columnists for American hegemony. In Russia's case, it has been easy for Putin to tarnish liberal democrats by associating them in the popular mind with past policies of accommodation and even subservience to the United States and the West.

Nevertheless, the Chinese are not just pretending when they claim their deep internal problems make them hesitant to pursue a more adventurous foreign policy. Leaders in Beijing rightly fear they are riding a tiger at home, and they fear external support for a political opposition more than they fear foreign invasion. Even promoting nationalism as a means of enhancing legitimacy is a dangerous business, since in Chinese history nationalist movements have evolved into revolutionary movements.

The Russian regime is also vulnerable to pressures from within and without, for unlike China, Russia still maintains the trappings of democracy. It would not be easy for a Russian leader simply to abandon all pretense and assume the role of tsar. Elections must still be held, even if they are unfair or are merely referendums on the selection of the leadership. This provides an opportunity for dissidents within and liberals on the outside to preserve the possibility of a return to democratic governance in Russia. It certainly would be a strategic error to allow Putin and any possible successor to strengthen their grip on power without outside pressures for reform, for the consolidation of autocracy at home will free the Russian leadership to pursue greater nationalist ambitions abroad. In these and other autocracies, including Iran,

promoting democracy and human rights exacerbates internal political contradictions and can have the effect of blunting external ambitions as leaders tend to more dangerous threats from within.

In most of the world today — in Asia, Europe, Latin America, and even Africa — the idea of supporting democracy against autocracy is not very controversial, though there are heated debates over precisely how to do it. The issue becomes more complicated when one turns to the Middle East, where some observers believe the Arab people are simply not ready for democracy and where the prospect of electoral victories by Islamist movements seems to some the worst possible outcome. Should the United States and others promote democracy in the Middle East too?

The struggle between modernization and traditionalism is largely a sideshow on the international stage.

Part of the answer comes if one turns the question around and asks: Should the United States support autocracy in the Middle East? That is the only other choice, after all. There is no neutral stance on such matters. The United States is either supporting an autocracy, through aid, recognition, amicable diplomatic relations, and regular economic intercourse, or it is using its manifold influence in varying degrees to push for democratic reform. The number of American thinkers who believe that the United States should simply support Middle Eastern autocrats and not push for change at all is small, and the number of policymakers and politicians who support that view is even smaller. After September 11, 2001, most observers agreed that American support for autocratic regimes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia was the "principal source of resentment" of the terrorists who launched the attack on the United States and that, therefore, a policy of simply supporting autocrats in those and other Middle Eastern countries would be a mistake.[20]

The main questions, then, are really a matter of tactics and timing. But no matter whether one prefers faster or slower, harder or softer, there will always be the risk that pressure of any kind will produce a victory for radical Islamists. Is that a risk worth taking? A similar question arose constantly during the Cold War, when American liberals called on the United States to stop supporting Third World dictators and American conservatives and neoconservatives warned that the dictators would be replaced by pro-Soviet communists. Sometimes this proved true. But other times such efforts produced moderate democratic governments that were pro-American. The lesson of the Reagan years, when pro-American and reasonably democratic governments replaced right-wing dictatorships in El Salvador, Guatemala, the Philippines, and South Korea, to name just a few,

[20] Samantha Power, "U.S. Democracy Promotion: Failure or Folly?" remarks to the Pell Center for International Relations and Public Policy (April 10, 2006).

was that the risk was, on balance, worth taking.

It may be worth taking again in the Middle East, and not only as a strategy of democracy promotion but as part of a larger effort to address the issue of Islamic radicalism by accelerating and intensifying its confrontation with the modern, globalized world.

Modernization, globalization, Islam, and their discontents

THE ISLAMISTS' STRUGGLE against the powerful and often impersonal forces of modernization, capitalism, and globalization is another significant fact of life in the world today. Much of this fight has been peaceful, but some of it has been violent and now, oddly, poses by far the greatest threat of a catastrophic attack on the mainland of the United States.

It is odd because the struggle between modernization and globalization, on the one hand, and traditionalism, on the other, is largely a sideshow on the international stage. The future is more likely to be dominated by the struggle among the great powers and between the great ideologies of liberalism and autocracy than by the effort of some radical Islamists to restore an imagined past of piety. But of course that struggle has taken on a new and frightening dimension. Normally, when old and less technologically advanced civilizations have confronted more advanced civilizations, their inadequate weapons have reflected their backwardness. Today, the radical proponents of Islamic traditionalism, though they abhor the modern world, are nevertheless not only using the ancient methods of assassination and suicidal attacks, but also have deployed the weapons of the modern world against it. Modernization and globalization inflamed their rebellion and also armed them for the fight.

It is a lonely and ultimately desperate fight, for in the struggle between tradition and modernization, tradition cannot win — though traditional forces armed with modern technology can put up a good fight. All the world's rich and powerful nations have more or less embraced the economic, technological, and even social aspects of modernization and globalization. All have embraced, albeit with varying degrees of complaint and resistance, the free flow of goods, finances, and services, and the intermingling of cultures and lifestyles that characterize the modern world. Increasingly, their people watch the same television shows, listen to the same music, and go to the same movies. And along with this dominant modern culture they have accepted, even as they may also deplore, the essential characteristics of a modern morality and aesthetics: the sexual as well as political and economic liberation of women, the weakening of church authority and the strengthening of secularism, the existence of what used to be called the counterculture,

free expression in the arts (if not in politics), which includes the freedom to commit blasphemy and to lampoon symbols of faith, authority, and morality — these and all the countless effects of liberalism and capitalism unleashed and unchecked by the constraining hand of tradition, a powerful church, or a moralistic and domineering government. The Chinese have learned that while it is possible to have capitalism without political liberalization, it is much harder to have capitalism without cultural liberalization.

Today radical Islamists are the last holdout against these powerful forces of globalization and modernization. They seek to carve out a part of the world where they can be left alone, shielded from what they regard as the soul-destroying licentiousness of unchecked liberalism and capitalism. The tragedy for them is that their goal is impossible to achieve. Neither the United States nor the other great powers will turn over control of the Middle East to these fundamentalist forces, if only because the region is of such vital strategic importance to the rest of the world. The outside powers have strong internal allies as well, including the majority of the populations of the Middle East who have been willing and even eager to make peace with modernity. Nor is it conceivable in this modern world that a people can wall themselves off from modernity even if the majority wanted to. Could the great Islamic theocracy that al Qaeda and others hope to erect ever completely block out the sights and sounds of the rest of the world and thereby shield their people from the temptations of modernity? The mullahs have not even succeeded at doing that in Iran. The project is fantastic.

Neither the United States nor anyone else has the ability to give the extreme Islamists what they want.

The world is thus faced with the prospect of a protracted struggle in which the goals of the extreme Islamists can never be satisfied because neither the United States nor anyone else has the ability to give them what they want. The West is quite simply not capable of retreating as far as the Islamic extremists require.

If retreat is impossible, perhaps the best course is to advance. Of the many bad options in confronting this immensely dangerous problem, the best may be to hasten the process of modernization in the Islamic world: more modernization, more globalization, faster. This would require greater efforts to support and expand capitalism and the free market in Arab countries, as many have already recommended, as well as efforts to increase public access to the modern world through television and the internet. Nor should it be considered a setback if these modern communication tools are also used to organize radical extremism. That is unavoidable so long as the radical Islamist backlash persists, which it will for some time.

Finally, the liberal world should continue to promote political modernization and liberalization; support human rights, including the rights of women; and use its influence to support repeated elections that may, if noth-

ing else, continually shift power from the few to the many. This, too, will produce setbacks. It will provide a channel for popular resentments to express themselves and for radical Islamism itself to take power. But perhaps this phase is as unavoidable as the present conflict. Perhaps the sooner it is begun, the sooner a new phase can take its place.[21]

Throughout all these efforts, whose success is by no means guaranteed and certainly not any time soon, the United States and others will have to persist in fighting what is, in fact, quite accurately called "the war on terrorism." Now and probably for the coming decades, organized terrorist groups will seek to strike at the United States, and at modernity itself, when and where they can. This war will not and cannot be the totality of America's worldwide strategy. It can be only a piece of it. But given the high stakes, it must be prosecuted ruthlessly, effectively, and for as long as the threat persists. This will sometimes require military interventions when, as in Afghanistan, states either cannot or will not deny the terrorists a base. That aspect of the "war on terror" is certainly not going away. One need only contemplate the American popular response should a terrorist group explode a nuclear weapon on American soil. No president of any party or ideological coloration will be able to resist the demands of the American people for retaliation and revenge, and not only against the terrorists but against any nation that aided or harbored them. Nor, one suspects, will the American people disapprove when a president takes preemptive action to forestall such a possibility — assuming the action is not bungled.

The war on terrorism must be prosecuted ruthlessly, effectively, and for as long as the threat persists.

The United States will not have many eager partners in this fight. For although in the struggle between modernization and tradition, the United States, Russia, China, Europe, and the other great powers are roughly on the same side, the things that divide them from each other — the competing national ambitions and ideological differences — will inevitably blunt their ability or their willingness to cooperate in the military aspects of a fight against radical Islamic terrorism. Europeans have been and will continue to be less than enthusiastic about what they emphatically do not call "the war on terror." And it will be tempting for Russian and Chinese leaders to enjoy the spectacle of the United States bogged down in a fight with al Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups in the Middle East, just as it is tempting to let American power in that region be checked by a nuclear-armed Iran. Unfortunately, the willingness of the autocrats in Moscow and Beijing to run interference for their fellow autocrats in Pyongyang, Tehran, and Khartoum

21 See, for instance, Reuel Marc Gerecht, *The Islamic Paradox* (AEI Press, 2004).

increases the chance that the connection between terrorists and nuclear weapons will eventually be made.

The end of grand expectations

When the Cold War ended, it was possible to imagine that the world had been utterly changed: the end of international competition, the end of geopolitics, the end of history. When in the first decade after the Cold War people began describing the new era of "globalization," the common expectation was that the phenomenon of instantaneous global communications, the free flow of goods and services, the rapid transmission of ideas and information, and the intermingling and blending of cultures would further knit together a world that had already just patched up the great ideological and geopolitical tears of the previous century. "Globalization" was to the late twentieth century what "sweet commerce" was to the late eighteenth — an anticipated balm for a war-weary world.

In the 1990s serious thinkers predicted the end of wars and military confrontations among great powers. European "postmodernism" seemed to be the future: the abandonment of power politics in favor of international institutions capable of managing the disagreements among nations. Even today, there are those who believe the world is moving along the same path as the European Union. John Ikenberry recently described the post-Cold War era, the decade of the 1990s, as a liberal paradise:

> The Cold War ended, democracy and markets flourished around the world, globalization was enshrined as a progressive historical force, and ideology, nationalism and war were at a low ebb. NAFTA, APEC, and the WTO signaled a strengthening of the rules and institutions of the world economy. NATO was expanded and the U.S.-Japan alliance was renewed. Russia became a quasi-member of the West and China was a "strategic partner" with Washington. Clinton's grand strategy of building post-Cold War order around expanding markets, democracy, and institutions was the triumphant embodiment of the liberal vision of international order.[22]

Perhaps it was these grand expectations of a new era for humankind that helped spur the anger and outrage at American policies of the past decade. It is not that those policies are in themselves so different, or in any way out of character for the United States. It is that to many people in Europe and even in the United States, they have seemed jarringly out of place in a world

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22 G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal International Theory in the Wake of 9/11 and American Unipolarity," paper prepared for seminar on "IR Theory, Unipolarity and September 11th — Five Years On," NUPI, Oslo, Norway (February 3–4, 2006).

that was supposed to have moved on.

As we now know, however, both nationalism and ideology were already making their comeback in the 1990s. Russia had ceased to be and no longer desired to be a "quasi-member" of the West, and partly because of NATO enlargement. China was already on its present trajectory and had already determined that American hegemony was a threat to its ambitions. The forces of radical Islam had already begun their jihad, globalization had already caused a backlash around the world, and the juggernaut of democracy had already stalled and begun to tip precariously.

After the Second World War, another moment in history when hopes for a new kind of international order were rampant, Hans Morgenthau warned idealists against imagining that at some point "the final curtain would fall and the game of power politics would no longer be played." But the world struggle continued then, and it continues today. Six decades ago American leaders believed the United States had the unique ability and the unique responsibility to use its power to prevent a slide back to the circumstances that produced two world wars and innumerable national calamities. Although much has changed since then, America's responsibility has not.

Held Back

No Child Left Behind Needs Some Work

By Frederick M. Hess and Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Passed by Congress in late 2001 and signed by President George W. Bush one year after his inauguration, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the most ambitious federal education statute ever. It overhauled and expanded Washington's role in education, rewrote the rules, and set out to boost pupil achievement, narrow a host of "learning gaps," and assure every student a "highly qualified teacher." The law's main engine, however, is an historic attempt to impose a results-based accountability regime on schools across the land. After five years of experience with a statute that aims to produce "universal proficiency" (in math and reading, mainly in grades 3–8) by 2014, and with reauthorization looming, it's time

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Frederick M. Hess is director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Chester E. Finn, Jr. is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. *This article is adapted from* No Remedy Left Behind: Lessons from a Half-Decade of NCLB *(AEI Press, August 2007).*

to draw some conclusions about how NCLB has unfolded on the ground — and how it ought to be changed.

Though NCLB is routinely labeled a "Bush" law — in no small part because the White House has proclaimed it a great domestic achievement while prominent Democrats have been far more equivocal — in fact its provisions are a Rube Goldberg-like assemblage of administration proposals, "New Democrat" schemes, liberal nostrums, and proposals and cautions introduced by countless other constituencies, all superimposed upon programmatic habits, architecture, and rules that had accumulated like reefs in federal education policy since LBJ worked in the Oval Office. Indeed, from the outset it was clear that implementing this mish-mash would recall the phrase that the late Daniel P. Moynihan used to describe LBJ's multifaceted community action program: "maximum feasible misunderstanding."

Accountability

NCLB's ACCOUNTABILITY ENGINE is driven by two pistons: insisting that states adopt systematic standards and testing for schools and districts; then intervening in ineffective schools and districts while also providing immediate relief for their pupils. Congress charged states with defining and adopting the standards and tests while spelling out in considerable detail the remedies that states and districts are responsible for providing. Yes, the statute contains hundreds of other provisions. But if its two main pistons aren't firing well, this complex engine won't budge the massive barge that is American schooling — much less render it a more agile craft.

On the assessment front, NCLB requires that all public schools annually test all their students in grades 3–8 in reading and math and that every state measure whether its public schools are making "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) toward universal proficiency in those core subjects by 2014. Each school must meet steadily rising goals in every demographic subgroup: by race, disability, English language status, and so on. Schools are then evaluated on the past year's achievement of each category in which they enroll a minimum number of students (that number being determined by the state, subject to federal approval). If a school fails to "make AYP" in any of those categories for two consecutive years, it is judged to be "in need of improvement"; if that school receives federal Title I dollars, it is then subject to a cascade of sanctions and interventions that grow more draconian with each additional year of failure.

The testing issues that arise from NCLB have received extensive attention. State and federal officials and platoons of academics have spent five years debating cut scores, proficiency targets, confidence intervals, and so forth. Receiving far less attention has been the remedies side of the equation. Here we address NCLB's own version of the seven-year itch, whereby a Title I

school that fails to make AYP is subject to a parade of stiffening interventions designed to change it and give new options to its students.

The remedies

WHAT DO THE remedies actually entail? If a federally aided school ("Title I school") fails to make AYP for two consecutive years, its students are supposed to be offered "public school choice," enabling them to attend other public schools in their district. Under that provision, the district is to provide each such child with a choice of alternative public schools (including charter schools) that *are* making suitable progress. Meanwhile, schools identified for improvement must draft or update a multi-year improvement plan and receive technical assistance that addresses the problems that led them to fail to make AYP.

If a school falters for a third straight year, its district is supposed to provide pupils with the opportunity to obtain "supplemental educational services" — essentially free after-school tutoring — from diverse providers, including private firms. This tutoring is to be paid for with a portion of the school's federal dollars — a sort of minivoucher. In addition, because the remedies are cumulative, qualifying students continue to be eligible for NCLB school choice.

If a school fails to make AYP for a fourth year running, its district is supposed to take "corrective action," replacing school staff, implementing a new curriculum, reducing the school's management authority, extending the day or year, appointing an outside expert to advise the school, or reorganizing the school. Pupils in such a school also remain eligible for NCLB school choice and supplemental services — and do so as long as their school fails to make AYP.

If it fails to make AYP for a fifth consecutive year, its district must (during year six) prepare a "restructuring" plan for it. This may include reopening it as a charter school, replacing its principal and staff, contracting with a private management company to run it, turning it over to the state, or any other "major restructuring" of school governance. If the school fails to make AYP for a sixth year, that restructuring plan is to be implemented by the beginning of the following (i.e., seventh) school year.

On paper, this all proceeds in an orderly and familiar top-down sequence, with federal rules spelling out what states are to do, states telling districts what to do, and districts working with their individual schools. State education departments are charged with setting standards, creating tests, intervening in faltering districts, and generally watching over matters. That hierarchy of responsibility — from Washington to state capital to local school system to schools — has been the basic architecture of federal education policy for decades. But it was never designed to support a results-based accountability system, to make effective repairs to faltering schools, or to function in an

environment peppered with education novelties like charter schools, home schooling, and distance learning. Yet NCLB's architects never paused to ask whether a hierarchy decently suited to distribute money according to certain formulae and rules could also handle the challenges of a very different and much more aggressive federal role.

The NCLB remedies show the influence of at least four different theories of education change. One is to boost achievement by helping children to exit weak schools for stronger ones — and to obtain remedial tutoring from education providers other than the (ineffectual) school itself. A second is creating market-style competitive pressures (via the exodus of students and dollars) to motivate weak schools or districts to improve. A third is to effect desired improvements by furnishing low-performing schools with technical assistance, guidance, and support in developing and implementing their own reform plans. And the fourth, in the event that the preceding steps do not yield the desired gains, is that states or districts are forcibly to "restructure" faltering schools. Alternatives. Competition. Help. Intervention. Over the seven-year time-frame elaborately constructed by NCLB, and with various options at each step, all four types of education reform — and the quartet of change theories that undergird them — were to be imposed on schools "in need of improvement."

Thus, NCLB's remedies are more an assemblage of reform ideas than a coherent scheme. They were adopted with scant attention to how they fit together, the resources or authority they would require, or whether they could be sensibly deployed through the available machinery. The result is messy and confusing at best, a patchwork produced by much compromising on Capitol Hill, all part of an 1,100-page cornucopia of programs, incentives, interventions, and sops to ideologies, advocates, and interest groups.

Findings

How well are these complex remedies working? Based on the research conducted for a forthcoming book, here's how we size things up. Eight points are key.

First, with the gift of hindsight, educational accountability under NCLB turns out to be less about any conventional notion of school improvement or "reinventing government" and more about fealty to a noble, even millennial aspiration. Rather than simply seeking to ensure that schools and school districts serve their students effectively, NCLB's authors set the extraordinarily ambitious goal that every single American child will be proficient in reading and math by 2014. In so doing, they took the language and mechanisms of standards-based education reform and married them to a policy agenda that owes more to Great Society dreams and the civil rights initiatives of the '60s than to any contemporary vision of disciplined education governance. In short, educational accountability à la NCLB is more a form of moral

advocacy than a sensibly designed set of institutional improvement mechanisms and incentives. Indeed, NCLB's aspirations call to mind the grandly ambitious "National Education Goals" that the nation's governors and the first Bush administration crafted in 1990. Those millennial targets, including the declaration that the U.S. would lead the world in math and science by the year 2000, quietly sank from view and are now mostly remembered for their naïveté and earnest unseriousness.

Yet the political calculus and compromises that produced NCLB meant that its soaring aspirations were coupled with outdated machinery, weak sanctions, and uncertain interventions. Rather than a sharp slap to the face of districts and schools that lose students, for example, NCLB choice results in no consequences for any educator at the school or district level, and the only pressure it brings on districts is the mandate that they may have to spend some of their Title I dollars for transportation. The tutoring minivouchers known as "SES" may mean that a small portion of Title I money flows to private providers, but there's no evidence that this spending has cost a single educator a job or pay raise — and most of the SES outlays, even by for-profit providers, flow back to local teachers who teach after hours for these firms. In short, as designed, the rhetorical nods that NCLB's proponents pay to competition are empty flourishes.

Unrealistic goals focus employees on compliance and on keeping out of trouble. Failure is inevitable.

Effective behavior-changing regimes are rooted in realistic expectations. Such pragmatism leads self-interested workers to take goals seriously, to focus relentlessly on outcomes, and to employ the levers at their disposal to produce those outcomes. When goals are patently unreachable, the logic of accountability changes in important ways. If managers and workers know they are unlikely to reach the target, their primary motivation becomes avoiding trouble when they fail. Since unrealistic goals make failure inevitable, they have the perverse effect of focusing employees on compliance and on keeping out of trouble — rather than on the ostensible goals. We sense — and fear — that NCLB's aspirational framework has created a system in which the prospect of likely failure by many schools gives educators more reason to focus on obeying rules and following procedures than on delivering results.

Second, almost everywhere, compliance-style activity is underway as state and local officials attempt, sometimes cynically and sometimes in good faith, to fulfill NCLB's formal requirements, fill out the forms, and keep the money flowing. NCLB's remedies don't actually require states, districts or schools to *do* better academically; they require only that states and districts comply with the remedies spelled out in the law. The law is frequently misunderstood as demanding student academic proficiency. In fact, it only requires that states and districts comply with its guidelines regarding the reporting of

data, spending, planning, and adoption of interventions. So long as officials do those things, whatever their progress or nonprogress on reading and math achievement, they are home free. While new data show growing compliance with NCLB in urban districts, state and district analyses document how unenthusiastic and formulaic most such activity appears to be. This is particularly perilous for the remedy provisions, as the impact of public choice, SES, or school restructuring depends almost entirely on earnest and imaginative execution.

Federal officials bear much responsibility here. Lawmakers assembled their bipartisan majority by agreeing to vague statutory language, and the executive branch has generally been unwilling to stand firm on implementation. After strong initial promises — that "lack of capacity," for example, would not be an acceptable excuse for failing to provide school choice — the Department of Education accepted half-measures and backed away from fights with states or districts. Some of this may be due to the particular challenges of NCLB and political decisions by the administration, but much can be attributed to decades of inertia in a bureaucracy built around regulatory compliance.

After strong initial promises, the Department of Education accepted half-measures and backed away from fights.

Third, NCLB's remedies (notably school choice and SES) are not, in fact, being much used or are being deployed in their mildest forms (e.g., school and district restructuring). Little NCLB-inspired choice is occurring; SES participation rates, though higher than before, remain laughably low in most places; and we see scant evidence of systematic school restructuring. Nor do states and districts appear to have the *capacity* to restructure more than a handful of schools, certainly not the hundreds, soon to be thousands, that NCLB has flagged as warranting such interventions.

Yet separate and apart from NCLB, we find a lot of standards-based and choice-based reforms occurring. Most of this action is state-initiated, some locally inspired, belying the view that NCLB is the only game in town or that tempering its aspirations would slow the nation's education renewal.

In practice, NCLB may have caught a reform wave more than causing one.

Fourth, on the plus side, there are places where NCLB has created political cover for state, district or school officials to take bolder actions than they otherwise might have taken. Scholars David Plank and Chris Dunbar, for example, suggest that the imagined threat of NCLB restructuring in Michigan has fostered a sense of urgency at low-performing schools. In some locales and schools, it has brought exigency and focus that were previously lacking. It is possible that the actual design and operation of the remedies aren't as important as their mere existence — and the mythology that

envelops them. We may be witnessing a "Wizard of Oz" phenomenon in which NCLB matters not for what it actually does but because it creates a scary presence "behind the curtain" that can be used to prompt otherwise painful changes and blamed for difficult decisions.

But can such an illusion last? As the NCLB wizard is revealed to wield little real power, the "political cover" he supplies is sure to fade. As it becomes apparent to all that neither federal nor state nor local officials have much idea how to "fix" schools nor any desire to sanction perpetual low-performers, educators and local officials will see the little man behind the drapes struggling futilely to scare them, and the law's remedies will lose credibility. This may also undermine non-NCLB accountability in the process.

Fifth, NCLB works very differently from state to state. In some, its prescriptiveness impedes the state's own approach to standards-based reform, as in Florida, where it mandates the restructuring of some schools that simultaneously earn honors grades from the state's own accountability system. Certainly NCLB sows confusion where, as in California, there are discrepancies in school ratings between state and federal models. In particular, the law's crude pass-fail grading system and its mandated restructuring cascade are complicating homegrown improvement strategies in such leading reform states as Florida and Massachusetts.

NCLB sows confusion where there are discrepancies in school ratings between state and federal models.

Less is known about NCLB's potential stimulus effect in those states — such as Oklahoma, Mississippi, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Idaho — that had done little by way of standards-based, accountability-style education reform as of 2002. The task for NCLB proponents is to demonstrate that the benefits in such states are substantial enough to outweigh the difficulties wrought in states that had already forged coherent accountability systems of their own.

Sixth, SES poses a particular challenge. Districts don't like losing money (which happens when parents opt for outside providers to deliver SES) but they don't mind their teachers earning extra dollars on the side. Providers of tutoring are loath to be regulated by hostile state authorities and may not teach in ways aligned to district curricula or state tests — but definitely want to maximize their enrollments. Parents get information through the school, which has little reason to steer them to outsiders who will take district funds and not necessarily help schools make AYP.

Across the land, evaluation and quality control have received scant attention, parent outreach has been half-hearted, and the SES machinery has proven balky. This development is not simply a consequence of lackluster implementation and perverse incentives; it's also a result of the hodgepodge of theories and compromises baked into the SES program itself. One faction views SES as prelude to full-fledged vouchers and, believing in competition

as a tool of school improvement, holds that allowing private tutoring providers to compete for Title 1 dollars will press low-performing districts to improve. A second group regards SES chiefly as a way to provide extra instruction to youngsters in low-performing schools, crafted to avoid harming either those students or their schools. A third cadre sees it as a mechanism for nurturing an industry of for-profit and nonprofit providers and innovative approaches to serving at-risk students.

Unfortunately, these disparate theories and strategies work at cross-purposes. In the end, there has not been competition, demonstrably effective remediation, or much evidence of innovation. We conclude that the SES provision is unworkable as presently designed.

In the private sector, outmoded competitors can be rendered irrelevant. In the public sector, this almost never happens.

Seventh, parts of NCLB are providing a wealth of data, sunlight, and transparency with regard to school-, district-, and state-level performance. This has empowered public officials and parents to lean on schools and districts and has equipped educators with new tools. We welcome the flood of additional information and suspect that, in the long run, NCLB's greatest accomplishment may be the school-performance data it furnishes to parents, educators, and state and local officials.

Yet even as it generates reams of information on pupil achievement and school performance, NCLB does a woeful job of gathering data pertaining to its own implementation, the deployment of its "remedies," and their effectiveness. In other words, NCLB is good at telling America how students and schools are faring today in math and reading but bad at telling anyone *what* they are doing, how they are changing, what remedies are being used in which ways where, and what difference (if any) those remedies are making. This means that very little can be learned about what to do more — and less — of by way of *altering* the present achievement picture.

Eighth and finally, the challenges posed by NCLB's remedies raise fundamental issues of federalism and whether the circa-1965 architecture, so reliant on state education agencies and local school districts for implementation, is even suitable for a "reform" regimen where it's the behavior of those very agencies that is to be altered. Such change-forcing steps require *somebody* to drop the hammer. Today, that somebody is the district in the case of schools and the state in the case of districts; yet neither hammer-wielder has shown much inclination to take politically tough steps. Meanwhile, colleges of education have done an abysmal job of providing school or district leaders with the skills to turn around troubled schools or districts, while state licensure regimes ensure that nearly all principals and superintendents get trained in those institutions.

In the private sector, outmoded competitors can ultimately be bypassed,

bankrupted, restructured, bought out, or otherwise rendered irrelevant. In the public sector, this almost never happens. Yet NCLB's remedies seem to take for granted that it will. That is a strategic error that threatens to undo the promise of the restructuring provision.

Thus, we find a truly mixed picture. Other parts of NCLB may or may not be working, but its "remedies" are at best iffy when it comes to catalyzing changes that boost school effectiveness and student achievement. At the same time, those remedies may impede school effectiveness, confound promising practices and functioning reform programs, and ask for such unrealistic acts that they breed cynicism.

Recommendations

THERE ARE TWO ways to draw guidance from what's been learned to date about the NCLB remedies. One is narrowly to ask how Congress might retool them to make them work better within the law's current structure and basic design. This is the path that Washington is most apt to follow at reauthorization time — the path of least resistance. It is the path charted by President Bush in his 2007 NCLB proposals, by most of the congressional leaders who have signaled their intentions, and by the Gates-funded, Aspen-housed National Commission on No Child Left Behind, which offered 60-plus separate recommendations in mid-February. It is also consistent with a long tradition of refining major laws on the basis of experience rather than fundamentally reconstructing them. And it places boundaries around the political tussles ahead.

A very different approach is to rethink the law's basic design. Though politically less likely, it would do children more good. Our eight recommendations draw upon both the incremental and more radical perspectives.

First, federal policymakers ought to be more realistic regarding what they undertake in K–12 education, acknowledging that Uncle Sam isn't good at finely calibrated, escalating sanctions of the kind that NCLB currently expects states and districts to execute. His capabilities are better aligned with a simpler model that leaves more room to state and local policy entrepreneurs to devise creative solutions. This may be an unwelcome message to advocates frustrated by the glacial pace of education change and eager to make a big difference in one giant leap, but it's a message they should heed.

Rather than imposing an incremental cascade of remedies, Washington should insist that states label schools that need help; that they act to strengthen such schools; and that they shut, replace or turn inside out those schools that resist improvement. That kind of mission is better attuned to Washington's strengths — and more closely resembles the recipe that Uncle Sam has used to excellent effect in reforming welfare.

In education, the key is to make clear that states — working through districts as they see fit — must assist schools that they identify as low-perform-

ing and help to clear away the barriers that stymie change agents from improving them. Simultaneously, choice programs should provide decent options to students — but for the kids' sake, not with any expectation that they will improve malfunctioning schools. After a certain point is reached, however — when schools have gone several years without showing sufficient improvement — the interventions that follow should be truly draconian. Such schools should be closed (with their buildings recycled to house new schools). In other words, there ought to be a presumption of good intention in the initial years, with the law geared to providing essential political cover and local muscle to clear-eyed reformers. Thereafter, the law should be designed to *replace* persistently ineffective schools. We believe this sequence — presumption of competence followed by swift and sure action — can provide the clarity of purpose and design that is currently lost amid NCLB's scattered components and disparate theories of action.

Parents, educators, and officials should be able to see clearly how their school, district, or state is doing.

Second, though Washington should trust states to turn around their own schools, all should be measured against a single set of national standards and uniform national tests, at least in the core subjects of math and reading. (This presupposes that such standards and tests can be competently and coherently designed — and not by politicians.) This would permit parents, educators, and officials to see clearly how their school, district, or state is doing. That strategy has the great merit of sorting out roles and responsibilities in the school reform domain, though we recognize that "national testing" will prove unpalatable to many Republicans and that "trusting states" will appall many Democrats. It is urgent, however, to distinguish the actions that the federal government can do well from those that must be entrusted to others.

Note, too, that the "others" do not necessarily have to be state and district education agencies, as assumed by the 40-year-old federal aid-to-education hierarchy that NCLB inherited. It may be that governors, mayors, nonprofit organizations, for-profit firms, regional authorities, and other such entities are better suited to handle the task of school reform. Washington might envision a contracting and multiple-provider regime in which a host of nontraditional players are empowered to provide and monitor schooling.

Because states differ so dramatically in their approaches (and commitment) to education reform, Washington should provide greater freedom for states that earn it. States that can document success in providing options to eligible kids or delivering effective school improvement deserve greater flexibility and the opportunity to serve as models and labs for other jurisdictions.

Third, instead of mandating "one step per annum" over a seven-year sequence, NCLB should afford states and districts the option of interventions that span several years. So, for example, if a school fails to make AYP (prop-

erly calculated), even for a single year, it would go into "corrective action" *and* its students would have access to SES *and* they would have the right to leave for other schools. But that phase would last four or five years, during which time the state or district can do pretty much whatever it likes to improve the school's effectiveness — and any federal rules, mandates, and spending restrictions that get in the way should be waived. The goal is to empower hard-charging superintendents and principals — and encourage others to charge harder, mindful that Washington will abet rather than impede them. States must do the same. For example, they should set aside provisions of collective bargaining contracts that impede the reform of faltering schools. (The Bush administration recently made a similar proposal.)

If the school does not begin to make AYP during that 4–5 year "corrective action" period, the hammer comes down. Now there are no loopholes and scant flexibility. The failed school must be turned over to someone else to run or else closed and its students accommodated at different schools. The key point is that if district efforts fail to strengthen a school, the district loses "ownership" of that school. (Similar logic should apply to state efforts to strengthen low-performing districts.)

This law identifies competent schools as "failing" and pushes states to dumb down standards.

Fourth, for any of this to work as intended, both parents and educators need to have confidence in the reliability of AYP as an identifying mechanism; any version of this scheme goes to pieces if states or districts are ordered to shutter schools that fair-minded observers view as reasonably effective. Right now, the law identifies hundreds of generally competent schools as "failing" and pushes states either to set unrealistic targets that ensure that this designation will apply to many more schools or else dumb down their standards. So long as this law ensnares borderline-effective schools in a confusing web of remedies, it will prove difficult for even the best-intentioned implementers to make work.

AYP determinations and reporting must be better attuned to schools' effectiveness (i.e., their pupils' academic gains as well as absolute performance) and better at distinguishing between schools (and districts) in serious trouble and those that succeed with most of their students. (The administration's 2007 NCLB reform recommendations point toward the possibility of AYP "growth models" for all states; four are piloting them today.)

What's more, the annual identification of school status needs to happen far faster so that educators, policymakers, and parents know what's up well before the next year commences. The incapacities of the testing industry must not be allowed to perpetuate the dysfunctional practice of delaying such information until August, September, or October. *All* of the NCLB remedies currently require that a school's status be determined annually. Ensuring the accuracy of such determinations has combined with the failings

of overburdened, underaccountable testing firms and balky data systems to produce an unworkable timetable. Sixteen states failed to finish identifying their "need improvement" schools from the 2005–06 school year before September, when the 2006–07 school year had already begun. For the remedies to work, states must radically alter their testing and data processes so that school identification is executed — and publicly reported — in weeks instead of months.

Fifth, parents, in particular, need better, faster, clearer information regarding their SES and school-choice options. These remedies also demand monitoring of SES providers, focused on actual delivery of services, better templates for communication and evaluation, and support for districts that do their best to make them work. States should conduct regular audits to encourage districts and schools to pay attention to customer service. It also makes sense to provide both SES and school choice simultaneously to students whose schools "need improvement."

Many states need help in fixing their troubled schools. Most lack the capacity. But that's not just an education problem.

A long-standing concern is the conflicted role that districts play as both SES providers and "gatekeepers" charged with negotiating agreements with alternative providers. This asks them to work against their own interests, manage responsibilities they're not equipped for, and engage in activities they regard as peripheral. The cleanest solution is for districts to cease controlling access to SES. Instead, states should explore how they could provide for other public or private entities to assume those responsibilities. Meanwhile, states must be required to monitor and report on the effectiveness of all their SES providers, districts included.

Sixth, if choice is to be a serious element of NCLB, as we believe it should be, more options are essential, including inter-district choice, the creation of greater capacity via a flood of high-performing charter schools, and the inclusion of academically effective private schools. (The Bush administration's 2007 NCLB reform proposals move in this direction.) Part of this entails the Department of Education's living by its stated position that lack of capacity is no valid excuse for failing to provide choices. Washington might require that districts find ways to offer feasible options — e.g., virtual schooling, expanding the capacity of successful schools, or raising state charter-school caps. States should lose federal dollars if their own statute books restrict (via charter school "caps," for example) the provision of new options for children who are entitled to choice but currently can't find acceptable options. Washington should make clear that — at the very least — such states need to get out of the way and allow entrepreneurs to try to meet the need in various ways, including through virtual schooling.

Seventh, many states and districts need expert help in fixing their troubled

schools. Most lack the capacity. But that's not just an education problem. We know of no sector, public or private, in which thousands of entities can separately assemble the know-how, talent, and organizational machinery to "turn around" troubled operations. Instead, such capabilities tend to be concentrated in a handful of specialized outfits such as "turnaround specialists" and niche consultants. If revitalizing low-performing schools (and districts) is to occur with any consistency at scale, primary-secondary education must develop that capability. The nation would benefit from a set of effective operators capable of contracting with multiple districts or states to provide the oversight, leadership and acumen to drive restructuring. Operating on that scale will permit specialization and cooperation and allow providers to build deep expertise. Washington cannot create this capacity, but it can provide resources, underwrite research, and encourage states to embrace nonprofit and for-profit entities that show a record of success.

Eighth and last, in reauthorizing NCLB, Congress should introduce real consequences for failure — and incentives for success. NCLB's current rewards and sanctions create little urgency for individual educators or school or district leaders. Collective bargaining agreements still protect the jobs of educators even in schools that pass beyond the restructuring horizon. (This one is the result of political timidity on Capitol Hill and at the Education Department, though in early 2007 the White House proposed to change course.) Failure to comply with the law or raise achievement has no clear results for the pay or job security of teachers or principals. The threat of federal dollars being withheld is all but toothless, mainly because Congress restricted this penalty to "administrative dollars" — and didn't apply it to weak academic performance, but rather to failure to submit acceptable "plans" to Washington.

We recommend that federal policymakers encourage states and districts to adopt personal consequences for inadequate performance and failure to improve. Superintendents and principals should be held responsible for their schools' outcomes, rewarded when those outcomes are good — and penalized when they're not. While many of today's calls for performance pay focus on rewarding teachers for test score results, the most fruitful place to begin is by ensuring that the executives have skin in the game.

Some closing observations

NCLB BEGAN WITH the noble yet naïve promise that every U.S. schoolchild will attain "proficiency" in reading and math by 2014. While there is no doubt that the number of "proficient" students can and should increase dramatically from today's 30-ish percent (using the National Assessment definition of proficiency), no educator in America believes that universal proficiency in 2014 is a serious goal. Only politicians promise such things. The inevitable result is cynicism among edu-

cators and a "compliance" mentality among state and local officials.

In critical ways, today's NCLB amounts to a civil rights manifesto dressed up as an accountability system. That's an untenable basis for serious reform, rather as if Congress declared that every last molecule of water or air pollution would vanish by 2014 or that all American cities would then be crime-free. The law is also pushing states to move aggressively in too many schools at once, ensuring that capacity won't match the challenges at hand. In this light, revamping the remedies begins with the need to refashion NCLB as a functional accountability system rather than as an aspirational one. The failure to do so portends an eventual public backlash that will not only threaten NCLB but may also discredit the years of clear thinking and coalition-building that have characterized educational accountability since the release of *A Nation at Risk* nearly a quarter-century ago.

Whatever the political value of promising to "leave no child behind," the results thus far threaten to undermine two decades of hard-won gains on educational accountability. NCLB's dogmatic aspirations and fractured design are producing a compliance-driven regimen that re-creates the very pathologies it was intended to solve. It's time to re-learn the hard lessons of the Great Society, when ambitious programs designed to promote justice and opportunity were undone by utopian formulations, unworkable implementation structures, and the stubborn unwillingness of supporters to acknowledge the limits of federal action in the American system.

Supply, Demand & Kidney Transplants

By Sally Satel

In May 2002, Clois Guthrie, an 85-year-old retired osteopathic surgeon, got the phone call he was waiting for: A suitable kidney had just become available for him. A renal transplant would mean liberation from the dialysis machine to which he had been tethered for two miserable years. Elated, Guthrie and his wife raced to the Porter Adventist Medical Center from their home in North Denver one hundred miles away.[1] Yet mere hours before the operation was to take place, the center's transplant surgeons were engaged in anguished deliberation over whether Guthrie was actually the right person to get that kidney. He was, after all, 85 years old. How much longer would he live with a new kidney? Shouldn't the organ, taken from a healthy 30-year-old motorcyclist who had died from head trauma, be given to a younger person who would get many more years of life from it?

Sally Satel is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. She is editing a book on the use of incentives to expand the supply of kidneys for transplantation.

The doctors decided to proceed, but in the end, there was a technical glitch and the operation did not take place. Guthrie went back on dialysis. Two-and-a-half years later he was dead of a heart attack at age 88. The ethical dilemma sparked by his case, however, did not die with him. Indeed, the question of "how old is too old for a transplant?" is being asked with increasing urgency by transplant professionals as the chasm between supply and demand widens inexorably.

Uneasy questions of allocation arise in environments of scarcity. Who will get to stay on the crowded lifeboat and who will be tossed overboard? This age-old tension between utility to society — the maximum good for the maximum number — and fairness to the individual is notoriously hard to resolve. In the case of the shortage of transplantable kidneys, it is made gratuitously more difficult by a "transplant community" that resists experimenting with bold ideas to increase the supply.

Dire shortage, modest remedies

ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION IS one of the crowning achievements of medical science. Yet from 1954 — the year of the first renal transplant — to the present, there have never been enough organs to meet demand. The dearth includes all transplantable organs — hearts, livers, lungs, pancreases — but because dialysis can keep patients with renal failure alive, the shortage of kidneys is most acute in terms of volume. Indeed, over three-quarters of the national wait-list population comprises those waiting for a kidney.

In January 2007, roughly 70,000 people were waiting for a kidney, according to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), which maintains the national registry of transplant candidates under monopoly contract with the Department of Health and Human Services. In big cities, where the ratio of needy patients to available organs is highest, the wait for a kidney ranges from five to eight years. This time is spent undergoing dialysis, a procedure that circulates the patient's blood through a machine (once called an "artificial kidney") that purifies it, siphons off accumulated water, and returns it to the body. Patients typically visit a dialysis center for treatment three times a week, for four hours each time. Many patients are deeply ambivalent about dialysis. They acknowledge its life-preserving role yet resent it as a vast intrusion into daily life that is often uncomfortable and debilitating.

Commitment to dialysis ends when a patient receives a transplant or dies. In 2006, only 17,804 people — or about one-quarter of the population waiting at the beginning of the year — received kidneys. Meanwhile, over

[1] Dr. Guthrie's story was reported in Alan Zarembo, "How old is too old for a transplant? Kidneys are scarce. Elderly patients may get fewer if rules change," *Los Angeles Times* (November 5, 2006).

3,813 died waiting and 1,190 became too sick to transplant. It is a grim picture that is guaranteed to worsen. By 2010, the median waiting time is projected to be at least ten years long, extending well beyond the length of time that most adults, especially those over 65, are able to survive on dialysis.

Despite decades of public education about the virtues of donating organs at death, the supply of cadaver organs has remained disappointingly steady over the years. Half of all Americans have designated themselves as donors on their driver's licenses or on state-run donor registries, yet if family members are unaware of a loved one's preference, they are just as likely as not to grant permission for the organs to be taken. This is understandable considering that the request generally comes at the worst possible time. Not only is their relative dead, but he may well have met a sudden and violent end. It is just this kind of victim — a young, healthy individual with severe head trauma (think helmetless motorcycle accident) — who is the optimal deceased donor.

In response to the crying demand, transplant centers have been rethinking the definition of a transplantable organ. Consequently, kidneys from so-called expanded-criteria donors have become an important new source. These are deceased donors, over 60 years of age, or those between 50 and 59 years who had hypertension in life or died of a stroke. The retrieval of organs from moribund patients who may never meet the criteria for brain death is also being advanced. Such potential donors are called "non-heart-beating" because they died of cardiac arrest. Finally, there is an effort to boost the numbers of transplants using kidneys from living donors through so-called kidney exchanges. In such an arrangement, two or more prospective donor-recipient couples who are incompatible with each other match with a member of the other pair.

Zero-sum game

MUCH AS THESE procurement innovations are welcome, they are likely to make only a modest contribution to supply.[2] The burden on transplant bureaucrats at UNOS, then, is how to allocate the limited reserve of cadaver kidneys in order to make optimal use of them. It is a problem UNOS has been working on for some time, and last winter the agency sponsored its Public Forum to Discuss Kidney Allocation Policy to unveil its new proposal. Central to the new allocation model was the con-

[2] Paired exchanges are estimated to yield about 1,000 new kidneys per year, according to Dorry Segev, MD, Johns Hopkins School of Medecine (personal communication, May 16, 2007). Non-heart-beating decedents may yield as many as 7,000 new donors per year (at 1.5 kidneys per donor, plus other vital organs) from deaths that occur in hospitals, according to Jim Warren, editor of *Transplant News* (personal communication, April 12, 2007).

cept of "Life Years from Transplant" — that is, how much longer a patient would likely survive after a transplant compared to how long he would live if he continued on dialysis instead.

The agency was seeking to maximize the number of additional years lived. In comparison with the first come, first served rule that currently guides kidney allocation, a scheme that prioritizes on the basis of life-years gained is more utilitarian. Starkly put, it views a healthy organ as wasted if it outlives its recipient — and the goal of optimizing longevity is to avoid a Clois Guthrie situation, in which a young kidney, able to prolong by decades the life of a 40-year-old, instead goes to an 85-year-old who dies a few years later, taking the organ with him.

"Who's to say an older person's five years of life are any less important than a younger person's nine?"

In addition to penalizing older candidates, justifiable though this may be, the new UNOS proposal also disfavors candidates who have waited the longest. Indeed, it is the very fact of having waited years that weakens a candidate's prospect for receiving a kidney. This is because the more time he spends on dialysis, the more medical deterioration he suffers and, as a result, the fewer years of added life a new kidney will confer.

Proponents of the new UNOS scheme denied that a rigid age cut-off would be applied. Yet they acknowledged that older candidates, as a class, would indeed be disadvantaged. This was a flashpoint. A number of physicians and transplant recipients took the microphone during the comment period to object. A few predicted the American Association of Retired Persons would lobby strongly against the proposal, as the new plan appeared to "discriminate" against older people. Others speculated that the thriving international black market in kidneys would get a further boost from well-to-do elderly who would become "transplant tourists" — the term used to describe patients who go overseas to purchase a transplant on the black market.

One transplant recipient in the audience expressed worry that patients who had logged years on the list already would become demoralized if waiting time became a minor factor in assignment. "It will destroy hope," she said; knowing you will get a kidney "is what keeps you going." Another recipient wondered: "Who's to say an older person's five years of life are any less important than a younger person's nine years? . . . That's playing God and people aren't going to like it."[3]

That is not playing God; that is playing man — the all-too-human affair of people deliberating strenuously and in good faith to determine what is right. The UNOS meeting dramatized the timeless "tragic choice" dilemma.

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[3] Judith Graham, "Should age determine who gets a kidney transplant? Controversial proposal would put younger patients higher on waiting list," *Chicago Tribune* (February 9, 2007).

The phrase comes from a classic 1978 book called *Tragic Choices* (W.W. Norton & Co.) by esteemed legal theorists Guido Calabresi and Philip Bobbitt. The authors delineate the conflicts society faces when it is compelled to distribute limited resources. Most wrenching for citizens and policymakers are choices among fundamental values. A transplant surgeon who cares for patients in a milieu of scarcity is no less a healer. He still wants his patients — young *and* old — to receive kidneys. Without question, a transplant will afford them a better quality and quantity of life — irrespective of age — not only in terms of liberation from dialysis but because they will be spared its cardiovascular complications. Yet, on the other hand, the surgeon is torn between his duty to the patient before him and the utilitarian imperative of enhancing survival benefit across the population of patients needing transplants.

It is the eternal tradeoff that comes with medical rationing: individual versus societal benefit. Who will be saved? This question recalls the classic quandary of lifeboat ethics that famously confronted the physicians who developed chronic dialysis in the early 1960s.

Rationing and its discontents

Effective dialysis began during World War II, but the technology could be used only in patients with temporary damage to their kidneys. Ongoing dialysis was not possible because of the difficulty of maintaining a connection between patients' veins and arteries and the artificial kidney, as the dialysis machine was once called. Glass tubing was used as the conduit for blood as it flowed into and out of the machine, but it would get blocked with clots from the vessel in which it was embedded. Doctors rotated the tubes after each dialysis session, but within a few weeks all viable vasculature would clot off. Unless the patient's renal failure reversed before then, he would die.

A breakthrough came on March 9, 1960, when a nephrologist at the University of Washington experimented with tubes made of a relatively new substance called Teflon. The non-stick surface of the Teflon allowed the tubes to remain in the patient's arm for months without clotting. "Suddenly, we took something that was 100 percent fatal and overnight turned it into 90 percent survival," said Dr. Belding Scribner, who pioneered the technique. And just as suddenly, the University of Washington Hospital was inundated with referrals for dialysis from physicians and patients across the country. Scribner secured private funding to underwrite an experimental dialysis program, the Seattle Artificial Kidney Center. It opened in January 1962 with a total of three treatment slots. But who among the dying should get them? Scribner argued that the job of choosing among medically eligible candidates ought to be shared by society.

Thus, a lay committee, known as the Admissions and Policy Committee

of the Seattle Artificial Kidney Center at Swedish Hospital, was formed to decide nothing less than who would be allowed to live. The committee comprised seven volunteers — a lawyer, minister, housewife, state government official, labor leader, banker, and surgeon — and was among the earliest instances, if not the first, of physicians bringing nonprofessionals into the realm of clinical decision-making. Committee members insisted on remaining anonymous so that the medical staff, the public, and especially the applicant-patients would never know their identities.

The lay committee took its Solomonic charge seriously. "As human beings ourselves," the lawyer told a reporter, "we rejected the idea, instinctively, of classifying other human beings in pigeonholes, but we realized we had to narrow the field somehow." The committee did this by considering many factors, among them the applicant's income, sex, marital status, net worth, nature of occupation, extent of education, church attendance, number of dependents (more dependents conferred a better chance of being chosen), and potential for rehabilitation.

Allocation of dialysis was among the first tragic choices to arise in the modern era of medical innovation.

Within five months of its founding, the lay committee was thrust into the public eye. The *New York Times* ran a front page story in May 1962: "Panel Holds Life-or-Death Vote in Allocating Artificial Kidney." In November, *Life*, the 1960s' most influential popular weekly magazine, ran a story by journalist Shana Alexander called "They Decide Who Lives, Who Dies: Medical Miracle Puts Moral Burden on a Small Community." The exposé drew national attention to what was happening in Seattle. Alexander dubbed it the "Life or Death Committee," and the accompanying photo spread depicted the members in silhouette, as if sitting in harsh judgment. In 1965, Edwin Newman narrated an NBC documentary about Seattle called "Who Shall Live?" Vocal physicians, social scientists, theologians, and legal scholars felt that the selection of dialysis recipients based upon determinations of human worth was an affront to the ideal of equality. The moral claim of each patient to treatment was equivalent, they argued. One much-cited essay in the *UCLA Law Review* bitingly observed that "The Pacific Northwest is no place for a Henry David Thoreau with bad kidneys," chiding the committee for ruling out creative nonconformists.

Allocation of dialysis was among the first tragic choices to arise in the modern era of medical innovation. Only on the battlefield had case-by-case triage ever been performed so explicitly. The scarcity of dialysis treatment generated layer upon layer of vexing questions. Who should receive life-saving care, who should choose, and on what principle? Some medical centers employed a first come, first served policy; a few shuttered their programs altogether so they would not have to choose. Most medical centers favored

the utilitarian principle of maximizing outcome — in other words, choosing patients who would get more productive years out of dialysis. Inevitably, this ended up favoring the same patients who impressed selection committees as more conscientious, better educated, and more likely to be beneficiaries of the emotional and instrumental support that comes along with stable families.

Thus, throughout the 1960s and early '70s, the tragic choice posed by dialysis was uneasily resolved in favor of handpicking patients. By 1972, however, pressure from advocates and physicians had become strong enough to move Congress to establish universal funding for dialysis. The Medicare End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) program, the new federal entitlement, offered virtually unfettered access to dialysis. Once the gate had swung open — admitting not only more patients who were good dialysis candidates (i.e., otherwise fairly healthy and cooperative) but also those with other medical and behavioral problems — enrollment and costs skyrocketed. More and more patients were kept alive on dialysis, and as advances in anti-rejection medication came about in the early 1980s, more people wanted kidney transplants, viewing dialysis as a bridge to surgery. With each passing year, the volume of candidates burgeoned and the amount of time spent waiting for a cadaver kidney increased. These dynamics were soon compounded by the aging of the U.S. population and the surge of diabetes (the most common single cause of renal failure). In 2004, the most recent year for which there are data, the ESRD enrolled about 340,000 patients and cost over $18 billion. Less than 1 percent of the Medicare population consumed more than 6 percent of Medicare expenditures that year.

Today, 35 years after the establishment of ESRD, we have come full circle. Once we were rationing dialysis, and now we are rationing kidneys. The details have changed, but the basic challenge of assigning scarce resources has not.

A shortage of altruism

UNDER THE 1984 National Organ Transplant Act, anyone who offers or receives something of material value in exchange for an organ can be charged with a felony. The ban's rationale was twofold: to prevent lurid scenarios in which desperately poor people auctioned off their spare parts to the wealthy and to ensure that citizens had equal access to the organs collected. "The prisoner in California gets the heart transplant because he needs it and is first on the list. It's blind to whether you're a saint or a sinner or a celebrity. That's key to maintaining the public trust," said Mark Fox, former head of the UNOS ethics committee.

But the trust is already damaged because of the death toll over which UNOS presides. The equity that UNOS seeks to preserve is "degenerating

into an equal opportunity to die waiting," nephrologist Benjamin Hippen told the President's Council on Bioethics last year. The dire shortage of organs today is striking evidence of the fact that altruism is not sufficient to produce enough organs. In 2006, there were 7,180 deceased donors (yielding an average of 1.5 kidneys each) and 6,242 living donors (mainly family and friends). At the end of that year, the 67,000 candidates remaining dwarfed the number of available organs.

A cohort of physicians and economists has sought for at least two decades to persuade the transplant establishment to apply incentives to increase the organ supply. Many creative arrangements — from tax credits to tuition vouchers for children to charitable contributions in the donor's name — should be given a trial, they urge, to see whether new practices could compensate for the limits of altruism. Over the past few years, their voices have grown more insistent. In 2003, the American Medical Association testified in favor of a House bill that proposed pilot studies of incentives for harvesting the organs of deceased donors. At the 2006 World Transplant Congress in Boston, Dr. Richard Fine, president of the American Society of Transplantation, asked his colleagues: "Is it wrong for an individual who wishes to utilize part of his body for the benefit of another [to] be provided with financial compensation that could obliterate a life of destitution for the individual and his family?"

At the 2007 annual meeting of the American Society of Transplant Surgeons in January, a straw poll revealed that 80 to 85 percent of participants were in favor of studying incentives for living and deceased donors, according to society president Dr. Arthur Matas of the University of Minnesota. The public is receptive as well. A 2007 national Gallup Poll on attitudes toward donation of organs after death found that incentives would encourage more respondents to donate than would be discouraged from doing so, though the majority said their decision would remain unchanged. Most striking, among the 18- to 34-year-old age group, 34 percent said they would be more likely to donate, 6 percent said they would be less likely to do so; the rest were unchanged.

The moral imperative to innovate

PARADOXICALLY, THE CURRENT system, which is based on an altruism-or-else policy, undermines respect for individual autonomy, one of the most dearly held values in bioethics. Why shouldn't donors be able to receive some form of reward for giving up a kidney to save a life, especially if the act of compensating them encourages others to do the same? To be sure, the idea of combining organ donation with material gain can make people queasy. Yet the mix of financial and humanitarian motives is commonplace. No one objects, for example, to a tax credit for charitable contributions — a financial incentive to complement the

"pure" motive of giving to others. The great teachers who enlighten us and the doctors who heal us inspire no less gratitude because they are paid. A salaried firefighter who saves a child trapped in a burning building is no less heroic in our eyes. Motives for giving an organ should not be the issue. More important than whether a kidney is given freely or for material gain is that it will increase the supply of kidneys to ameliorate suffering.

How could incentives work? A plan first offered in the late 1980s proposed to register a would-be donor today in return for the possibility of a much larger payment to his estate should his organ be used at his death. A major advantage of such a forward-looking approach is that the decision-making burden is taken off family members at a painful time — when they are sitting in the emergency room learning that someone they love is now brain-dead. The drawback to this plan, however, is that deceased donors alone cannot meet the need for kidneys because very few Americans who die, perhaps 13,000 a year (or less than 1 percent of all deaths), possess organs healthy enough for transplanting. Thus, even if every American participated in a futures arrangement, the need for thousands of kidneys would go unmet.

Why shouldn't someone be rewarded for giving up a kidney to save another person's life?

Of course, the organs from deceased donors obtained through a futures mechanism would be a most welcome contribution to the pool, but in order to enhance supply more quickly and more robustly, living donors need to be recruited as well. Not only can a person live a healthy life with one kidney, but the long-term risk to the donor is negligible, and short-term risks are comparable to surgical intervention in general (about 3 deaths in 10,000). Moreover, a kidney from a living donor lasts longer than one from a cadaver, thereby keeping young and middle-aged recipients from getting back in the queue for a second organ sooner than they otherwise might have to.

What kinds of incentives could be offered to individuals amenable to relinquishing a kidney while living? Perhaps the federal government could offer lifetime Medicare coverage. Not only would this be medically responsible; it could serve as an inducement to donate — not to mention saving taxpayer dollars by liberating patients from costly dialysis. If the promise of health insurance did not attract a sufficient pool of donors, other incentives could be offered as well. For example, the donor could choose from a menu of options including a deposit to a 401(k) retirement plan, tax credits, tuition vouchers for the donor's children, long-term nursing care, family health coverage, life and nonfatal injury insurance, a charitable contribution in the donor's name, or cash payments stretched over time. Under this scheme, Medicare would underwrite the incentives in light of the fact that it already pays for dialysis treatment, which costs about $66,650 per patient annually according to the United States Renal Data Service. Compare these

expenses with the cost of a transplant operation — approximately $75,000 in all for the one-time cost of the surgeries and hospital stays of the donor and recipient, plus the first year of follow-up medical care including medication. Thereafter, the cost of immunosuppressive drugs is about $12,000 per year.[4]

An important concern accompanying any enrichment plan is the potential for exploiting donors — especially low-income donors who, as the critics reasonably claim, will be the most likely to find incentives attractive. This is why donor protection is the linchpin of any compensation model. Standard guidelines for physical and psychological screening, donor education, and informed consent could be formulated by a medical organization, such as the American Society of Transplant Surgeons, or another entity designated by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). A "waiting period" of three to six months could be built in to ensure that the prospective donor has ample time to think through his commitment. Monitoring donor health post-transplant is important as well and should include annual physicals and laboratory tests for one to two years after donation.

Incentive arrangements could be overseen by HHS or an entity it designates. As is currently the case with cadaver organs, kidneys obtained from compensated donors would be matched with the next best candidate waiting on the national list. This would require revising the National Organ Transplant Act to lift the ban on valuable consideration so that experimental trials could be conducted. Alternatively, Congress might permit individual states to apply for a waiver from the ban in order to devise their own incentive systems.

Within such a framework, altruistic donation would proceed in parallel with a system that offers compensation. Any medical center or physician that objects to the practice of compensating donors can simply opt out of performing transplants that use such organs. Recipients on the list are free to turn down a paid-for organ and wait for one given altruistically. Choice for all — donors, recipients, and physicians — is enhanced, while lives are saved.

A reprieve

THESE BROAD PROPOSALS and variants on them need considerable elaboration. There is no denying the political and practical challenges that come with introducing payment into a 20-year-old scheme built on the premise that generosity is the only legitimate motive for relinquishing an organ. Yet as death and suffering mount, constructing an

[4] Arthur J. Matas and Mark Schnitzler, "Payment for Living Donor (Vendor) Kidneys: A Cost-Effectiveness Analysis," *American Journal of Transplantation* 4 (February 2004).

incentive program to increase the supply of transplantable organs becomes a moral imperative.

We see again in 2007 how remarkable advances in transplant medicine have reintroduced the classic dilemma of equity versus utilitarianism that beset the medical profession in 1962 after the advent of dialysis therapy. To be sure, the world of health care is no stranger to rationing — simply determining what pharmaceuticals are to be covered by health plans is a form of rationing. But rarely has case-by-case access to treatment been as overt as it was in the early days of dialysis and is now in transplantation, though these days it is perhaps somewhat less dramatic, as choices are not based explicitly upon patients' social characteristics.

Would incentives work? There is good reason to be optimistic, but pilot studies are required to test various models. Architects of any new plan must give serious consideration to principled reservations and practical concerns; but they must act nonetheless, taking small, cautious steps. One thing is certain: A larger pool of kidneys would offer a reprieve, at least a partial one, to those patients languishing on dialysis and to those given the tragic charge of deciding which lives will be saved.

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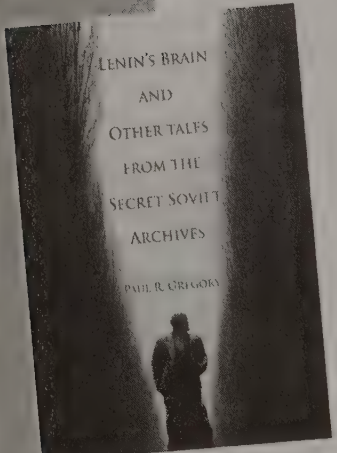

Lenin's Brain and Other Tales from the Secret Soviet Archives

PAUL R. GREGORY

The opening of the once-secret Soviet state and party archives in the early 1990s proved to be an event of exceptional significance. When Western scholars broke down the official wall of secrecy that had stood for decades, they gained access to intriguing new knowledge they had previously only been able to speculate about. In this fascinating volume, Paul Gregory takes us behind the scenes and into the archives to illuminate the dark inner workings of the Soviet Union.

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Paul R. Gregory, a Hoover Institution research fellow, holds an endowed professorship in the Department of Economics at the University of Houston, Texas, and is a research professor at the German Institute for Economic Research in Berlin.

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Making Intelligence Smart

By Elbridge A. Colby

A disastrous "bolt from the blue" attack kills thousands; enraged politicians and pundits point fingers; committees gravely recommend changes; a massive reorganization of the nation's security and intelligence organs follows. Sound familiar? It's the chain of events that followed not only the attacks of September 11, but also those of December 7, 1941 in America and October 1973 in Israel; you can find a similar pattern at work in the shocking fall of British Singapore to the Japanese in 1942 and even in the Roman Senate's reaction to the surprising irruption of Hannibal into the Italian peninsula.

Yet to listen to today's conventional wisdom — *we can make intelligence much better, and doing so will make us much safer* — one would think that the problem of surprise attacks and intelligence failures had never before been addressed by governments. After 9/11, political leaders and opinion-

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Elbridge A. Colby was a staff member in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and on the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. He is currently an adjunct staff member at the RAND Corporation. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not reflect the views of the U.S. government or the RAND Corporation.

makers on both sides of the aisle clamored for sweeping and immediate reform: The Democrats banged the table for the full-fledged adoption of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations; congressional Republicans and their think tank allies demanded a more "forward-leaning" human intelligence service; and chin-stroking centrists argued the nation should put more dollars into intelligence collection, steering clear of the sharper-edged policies that earn us the world's opprobrium. Then came the intelligence missteps associated with the Iraq WMD program, at which point the demand for a better intelligence system grew strong enough to overwhelm the natural inertia of the status quo.

Six years after September 11, this wave of reformist zeal has finally crested — for the time being at least — leaving an opening for us to take stock of what all the sound and fury has left behind. Some good ideas have been proposed and implemented, and some bad ones as well; none, however, is likely to make our intelligence dramatically better or the U.S. dramatically safer. Examining why this is so, both theoretically and practically, reveals a more nuanced picture of what intelligence can do, how it can be improved, and how it fits into a smoothly running national security system.

Some needed reforms

First, the good news: There hasn't been a mad rush to string up the unlucky along with the few incompetent, as there was in the wake of Pearl Harbor. The narrative innards of the 9/11 report on the September 11 attacks and the WMD Commission report on Iraq War intelligence errors did not purport to chronicle sorry tales of stupidity, incompetence, and failure.[1] Neither report tried to pin the blame for what had gone wrong on one administration or party. Even the more strident congressional reports on 9/11 and the Iraq WMD fiasco avoided too much mud-slinging. Instead, they all told very complicated stories and drew somewhat mundane lessons: There was insufficient cooperation between the foreign intelligence apparatus and the FBI; CIA analysts feared embarrassment if they were shown to have underestimated Iraq's nuclear program for a second time; and, more generally, the behavior and intentions of al Qaeda and Iraq were, when judged fairly, extremely hard to decipher. Both reports focused on analysis as the most troubled area of intelligence performance and directed their recommendations toward rectifying its faults. Ultimately, both reports implied that the American intelligence system had serious flaws but that the difficulties of understanding the threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction are not susceptible to easy fixes.

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[1] Disclosure: The author was a staff member on the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction ("WMD Commission") and focused particularly on the Iraq intelligence errors.

The tone of the reforms that followed, however, was set by the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Report, released in late summer 2004. It was these, backed by an aggressive public relations campaign by the commissioners, that were largely written into law with the passage of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. (The WMD Commission recommendations, released in spring 2005, focused chiefly on developing a leadership program for the director of national intelligence and other intelligence community leaders in light of the new law.)

The 9/11 Commission's sweeping recommendations were not, unfortunately, nursed to maturity in the same painstakingly careful manner as the narrative. They were drafted in the last few weeks of the Commission's work, as Chairmen Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton relate in their somewhat immodestly titled *Without Precedent: The Inside Story of the 9/11 Commission.* And they did not follow logically from the rather more complicated story told in the report's narrative.[2] But the finer details were lost amid the perfect storm generated by the release of the report in the months before the bitterly fought 2004 election. John Kerry quickly took up the Commission's recommendations and began casting aspersions against the president for not showing sufficient reverence for their wisdom. The Bush administration was initially resistant to the wholesale adoption of the Commission's advice. But the parade of politicians and pundits calling for immediate action proved too much to resist, and so the administration made the best of the situation. Thus the Intelligence Reform Act, which became law in December 2004.

The parade of politicians and pundits calling for immediate action proved too much for the administration to resist.

The fact that the act's big-ticket reforms did not necessarily follow from the lessons of the 9/11 attack didn't mean that it was bad for the nation's intelligence apparatus overall. Needed reforms were pushed through: the creation of the position of director of national intelligence,[3] a single official vested with considerable powers over the budget and personnel of the entire intelligence community; the separation of the functions of the leader of the intelligence community from those of the head of the CIA, long a burr under the saddle of the other intelligence agencies; the appointment of a program manager to develop an information-sharing "environment" across the government (an aim admittedly in some tension with the act's centralizing tendencies); the beginning of a long-overdue integration of intelligence work's

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[2] Richard Posner analyzed this disconnect in an incisive deconstruction of the commission report in the *New York Times Book Review* (August 29, 2004). He has expanded these arguments in his subsequent books *Preventing Surprise Attacks* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) and *Uncertain Shield: The U.S. Intelligence System in the Throes of Reform* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

[3] Disclosure: The author worked as a staff member in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence in 2005–06.

foreign and domestic spheres; the encouragement of language training for intelligence officers; the promotion of a "joint" culture across intelligence elements; and others.

But the act also canonized certain deeply problematic approaches to intelligence reform, which will need to be corrected if reform is going to prove a fruitful rather than misguided enterprise. The habits of a new regime tend to persist, honored by subsequent generations, unless checked by other forces in the system or the hard shock of adverse events. The U.S. intelligence community has witnessed this phenomenon already and suffered from it. Early waves of CIA officers idolized the buccaneers of the Office of Strategic Services, who prized intrepidity, bravery, and action over diligence, security, and care. Only after repeatedly having their hats handed to them by the KGB in the 1950s in Ukraine, Albania, and elsewhere did the CIA begin to emphasize the drier, but more apposite, work of careful espionage. Likewise, the massive push for intelligence reform in the wake of 9/11 and Iraq is likely to set the parameters for the intelligence community in the coming years. It is therefore imperative that the mistaken emphases and presumptions of the act be identified and corrected.

Deeper problems

THE GOVERNING THRUST of the act was a centralization of control. Often championed as a solution to governmental failure by blue ribbon commissions, centralization is a blade that can cut both ways. In some areas of the intelligence community, centralization could represent a major improvement — for instance, in the development of complex, long-term technical projects. The appointment of a single, final decision-maker with a broad perspective can bring a more rational approach to the development and management of major technical initiatives. This move may well yield considerable savings and a more appropriate technical infrastructure for the intelligence community. In other fields, and particularly that of operations, centralization was carefully limited, and so its influence will, for good or ill (probably more for good), be less marked.

The area where centralized decision-making has the potential to do severe damage is analysis — the main target of reformist zeal in the wake of the various commission reports, which chastised intelligence community analysis for "lack of imagination" and "failing to connect the dots" in dealing with both 9/11 and Iraq. The act shifted the prestigious National Intelligence Council into the DNI's office and gave the DNI and his deputies considerable responsibility for the heavy duty of improving the quality of analysis. This has resulted in some very commendable developments, particularly by opening the once-closed channel between the White House and the CIA. A wider variety of analytic products now makes its way to the Oval Office and other top decision-makers. For instance, the prestigious

President's Daily Brief now includes submissions from intelligence components other than the CIA. Separately, the creation of the National Counterterrorism Center, lambasted by critics as an undue centralizing step, actually has resulted in an increase in serious competitive analysis while reducing duplication and confused warning. Generally, there is a wider range of analytic voices informing policy today than there was before the Intelligence Reform Act, and that is a good thing.

That said, there are reasons to be worried. This centralizing tendency could, particularly under the pressure of another intelligence "failure" (always a possibility), encourage the intelligence community's leadership to keep a tight leash on analysts and to insist on knowing *exactly* what is going to the president and senior leadership — an understandable temptation, since they are likely to be held personally accountable for it. (Ask George Tenet.) Such a temptation must be resisted. Centralized analysis funneled through a narrow leadership cordon will gravitate toward the lowest common denominator; it will avoid risky but potentially spot-on judgments, shun possibly illuminating informed speculation, and generally hew closely to a safe middle line. It will continue to focus on the near term, on beating CNN rather than on providing valuable long-term strategic estimates. Such analysis will be of little use to its consumers. For the issues central to their responsibilities, policymakers do not need safe estimates ginned up through political science models; they need the thought-through estimates of experienced analysts who are knee-deep in both classified and unclassified material.

The CIA has a deep ardor for political science and an interest in not veering too far off the reservation.

But there are deeper, systemic problems reaching to the very discipline of analysis. Indeed, analysis in the intelligence community needs recalibration if it is to prove useful in a world in which politics and society, intentions and behavior, and radicalization and reform are often of greater importance than the traditional pastimes of counting warheads and tanks. The CIA's analytic corps, in particular, is saddled with a dedication to political science as a discipline, multiple layers of review, and an institutional interest in not veering too far off the reservation, which have made it ill-fitted to confront the analytic challenges of the new era.

Unfortunately, the CIA's ardor for political science goes deep. The U.S. intelligence community's analytic arms grew to maturity during the years of highest confidence in academic social science, and many of the top analysts in the early years of the CIA and its affiliated arms seized on the power of social science to tame the unpredictable. Sherman Kent, author of the influential *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1949) and longtime head of the Board of National Estimates (roughly equivalent to today's National Intelligence Council), focused on grounding

CIA intelligence analysis in empirical social science, aggregating the data that came in from human and technical sources worldwide, and building up a coherent model that would allow CIA analysts to deliver viable predictions to their policymaking "consumers."

Kent's way of thinking has persisted in the intelligence world, developing into a "tradecraft" of analysis that emphasizes a social science method of models and empiricism. Young analysts are taught to pore over reams of intelligence reports, sift for patterns, construct analyses based on the models of political science, and submit their "products" for review by more senior analysts, who are presumably better schooled in the process. Intuition, contextual details, and history (not to mention humor) tend to get second billing and are generally filtered out as they pass up the chain. The theory behind the approach is that political science, like the natural sciences, provides the techniques for turning masses of data into systematic knowledge and, most preciously, predictions. This is why the CIA sees relatively little problem in having its analytic workhorses be recently minted graduates of doctoral, master's, and even undergraduate institutions. If the model works, any bright young fellow can manage it.

Intuition, contextual details, and history (not to mention humor) are filtered out as they pass up the chain.

There are serious problems with this approach, principally in the fields of political and social phenomena. Critics of the intelligence apparatus have correctly pointed to the limits of the empiricist mode of knowing (though they have often veered too far in the opposite direction, overemphasizing ideology as an explanatory factor in political behavior). Meanwhile, government policymakers of all political stripes discount as a matter of course the social scientific jargon they receive from the big intelligence agencies, opting instead for direct access to original reporting, personal contact with individuals (inside or outside government) steeped in a particular region or issue — think, for example, of the long line of senior officials seeking the counsel of Bernard Lewis — or other methods of gathering knowledge. New entrants to policy jobs will remark routinely how disappointed they are that the purported "mighty Wurlitzer" of the intelligence agencies seems only to give them warmed-over political science papers.

It should come as no surprise, however, that the CIA has not discovered the alchemist's key to reducing human phenomena to scientific categories. They can hardly be faulted for it, after all. The impulse of social science to predict, understand, and categorize is fallacious at the deepest level, discounting the complexity of human beings and especially human interaction. We are actors with respondent and intelligent wills, the intermingling of which invariably frustrates the attempt to predict our behavior beyond the most general terms. Human beings cannot and will not be planned for; we

will react and frustrate any attempt to bind us into neat predictive categories.

What this means for intelligence is that models of understanding founded on a presumed symmetry between human behavior and the behavior of natural phenomena are fatally flawed. Just as the great planning initiatives of the mid-twentieth century, the era of John Maynard Keynes, John Kenneth Galbraith, Walt Rostow, and the Great Society, failed because they underestimated the inherent complexity of human relations, so too will an analytic model built on fitting facts into strict predictive models, as in a chemical experiment. Ronald Reagan no doubt gleaned as much from talking with and reading Alexander Solzhenitsyn as he did from all the intelligence analysis on life in Soviet Russia presented to him daily. An intelligent reader of Vaclav Havel and Adam Michnik would have seen more deeply into the existential predicament of the Eastern Bloc than one confined to the political science literature. Likewise, Bill Clinton may have learned as much about the mentalities of the peoples of the Balkans from reading Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* as from the great number of bloodless government reports he received during the 1990s. Nor, from an earlier era, can one ignore Hitler's intuitive understanding of French weakness, which proved more predictive than his staff's insistence that the correlation of forces favored the Third Republic over the Third Reich. Indeed, in some sense political leadership is precisely an understanding of and ability to master intuition and practical wisdom about others' situations.

Reagan no doubt gleaned as much from talking with Solzhenitsyn as from all the intelligence analysis he saw.

When training the new generation of analysts, therefore, the intelligence community should focus not on achieving the hopeless twentieth-century dream of taming human life through predictive social science, but rather on the murkier but more realistic categories of practical wisdom and intuition. History, biography, culture, religion, social life and expectations — these should be critical parts of any political analyst's field of regard. This is particularly the case when analyzing political and social developments, including the strategies of foreign leaders, the issues that have become ever more salient in a world of terrorists, rogue states, and asymmetric threats.

This is not to discount the absolute importance of empiricism in certain fields of intelligence analysis, particularly the crucial areas of military balances and capabilities, which predominated during the Cold War. When thinking about these things, empiricism is to be preferred over intuition. Counting Soviet ICBMs did not require considerable political understanding — Solzhenitsyn was of little help on this problem. The social science model, though deeply flawed, was well-suited for some of the biggest challenges of the Cold War intelligence system. Understanding the Kremlin's mindset was only one of the intelligence community's duties, after all. It was also charged

with keeping tabs on the Soviets' strategic and conventional forces, a military task that lent itself to a social science approach. It therefore made sense that great energy was invested in determining the intelligence community's judgment about the numbers and dispositions of Soviet nuclear weapons. So too, today, the intelligence community must provide rigorous and empirically grounded analysis on a range of capabilities issues, from the state of the North Korean or Iranian nuclear programs to China's delivery systems and so on. It is vitally important that such technical know-how flourish within the intelligence community, since it is only within the community that access to the fullest range of data is available.

But in today's world the intelligence challenges have become much more political in nature. How will "rogue states" behave? What motivates radical terrorists? What is the drift in Muslim or Iraqi public opinion? These are questions of intention and of human decisions. They are not questions that can be answered satisfactorily by being run through a computer. They require a depth of knowledge, a humility about our ability to understand and predict, and a holy fear of the power of contingency.

Questions of intention and of human decisions cannot be answered by being run through a computer.

It is precisely in the nexus between capabilities and intentions that the toughest intelligence challenges are to be found. A well-ordered analytic infrastructure in the intelligence community would, therefore, redress the excessive tilt towards empiricism by "breathing with both lungs," empiricist and intuitive-historical. To simplify, hard empirical and technical analysis would provide the foundation from which historical-intuitive estimating would proceed to render judgments about intentions, political development, and so forth. This would stand in marked contrast to the empiricist-dominated, capabilities-based assessment model that was handed down from the Cold War and that, for instance, prevailed in the analysis on Iraq's WMD programs in the years before 2003. The intelligence community would provide policymakers both with the hard facts and with reasoned, intelligent, and subtle estimates on what those hard facts actually mean.

Institutionally, this would mean a reduction in bureaucratic overhang, particularly at the CIA and the other big intelligence agencies, such as the Defense Intelligence Agency. Interesting and incisive products are unlikely to emerge from a succession of reviews that tend to chip away at the sharp-edged analytic judgments that need to be encouraged. As in the academic arena, "peer review" should take the place of review by increasingly disconnected senior analytic managers. CIA and DIA might take a cue from an old rival, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, whose analysts are incentivized to become true experts, individuals whom senior officials can call on for a thorough understanding of a given country or

topic. CIA could also become more receptive to recruiting analysts laterally from positions in academia or think tankery, a step that could also have the practical effect of bringing in individuals trained to develop intellectual work in a less bureaucratic but highly competitive atmosphere. In such a system, a strengthened tendency to take interesting positions designed to establish one's professional reputation would be counterbalanced by a terror of not having one's facts straight — as in (at least parts of) academia.

With reforms such as these in analysis, coupled with a more national and rational perspective on program development and management, a push for further integration of domestic and foreign intelligence, and an incentivization of information sharing rather than hoarding, the U.S. intelligence system might realistically improve its performance significantly.

No hidden key

BUT "SIGNIFICANTLY" MEANS only something roughly on the order of 5 percent to 10 percent — a massive increase when the cost and importance of intelligence is taken into account but certainly no grand "transformation." This is where the second, deeper, and more intractable fallacy of intelligence reform comes in: the hope for a "transformation" in intelligence — a new, radically different, improved level of performance, which will allow the intelligence community to bear a much heavier burden in the uncertain future of WMD proliferation and catastrophic terrorism.

Such a grand "transformation" seems to be precisely what many, particularly those outside of the intelligence community, hope for. Intelligence, it is said, is fundamentally "broken" and needs to be "fixed," made "better." Of course, politicians routinely use such language — intelligence is hardly unique in this respect. What is different, however, is the extent to which hopes for a radical improvement in the quality and quantity of intelligence provide the grounds for opposition to other security policies that officials wish to avoid. The promise of "better" intelligence is presented as grounds for dispensing with the government's interrogation policies, for instance, or for a blanket denial of the possibility of preventive or preemptive war, for opposition to domestic wiretapping, for a more sanguine attitude towards the brinksmanship of rogue states, and so forth. If, as it is hoped, far better and more intelligence can be derived from the traditional methods of collection — human and technical — then there is no need to make hard decisions on these other, more difficult matters. Intelligence reform becomes an excuse for inaction.

Intelligence cannot bear this burden. Conceptually, as described above, intelligence is the art of prediction about human beings, and this art is *in se* a supremely inexact one. There is no hidden key that will remove contingency and surprise from calculations about American security. Kim Jong-Il, the

Iranian leadership, Hu Jintao, and even our allies will continue to behave in ways that defy many of our predictions, in part because they will take our rational predictive models into account when they decide how to behave. Equally important, as the controversial theorist of intelligence Donald Rumsfeld has pointed out, there will always be unknown unknowns — phenomena we do not see coming at all. As Richard Posner speculates in his book *Catastrophe*, who is to say that the next great terrorist attack will not come from an obscure Aum Shinrikyo-like cult rather than al Qaeda? The range of possibilities is infinite, while the amounts of mental energy and man hours of our analysts are finite, and so we will always be groping in a great deal of darkness. Furthermore, as a practical matter, the intelligence that we need is almost always extremely hard to come by; it is protected by our targets for a reason. It is worthwhile considering, for instance, that the current difficulties the U.S. appears to be experiencing gathering information on the Iraqi insurgency are not unprecedented; the U.S. had equivalently little success in understanding the Viet Cong.

The prospect of assured destruction was enough to dissuade Russia from embarking on the century's third land war.

This profound limitation entails that hard decisions on security policies cannot be avoided. The best intelligence performance cannot, as John Keegan demonstrated in his book *Intelligence in War*, obscure the fact that wars (including the war against al Qaeda and its ilk) are ultimately won by a combination of force and will. Indeed, American strategic planners should be well aware of this fact. After all, it wasn't our intelligence services that outlasted the Soviet Union during the Cold War — it was our willingness to use overwhelming force, manifested in our nuclear weapons combined with our impressive conventional forces. If anything, our intelligence services were beaten in the espionage field by the Soviets and their myrmidons, such as the Cubans. The prospect of assured destruction — a devastating retaliatory attack against Soviet value and force targets; in plain terms, the mass annihilation of the Soviet leadership and population — was enough to dissuade the Russian bear from embarking on the century's third land war in Europe.

So too it is today. Our security is ultimately guaranteed by the strength of our capabilities backed by our will to use them — in particular our credible nuclear and conventional deterrent and retaliatory capabilities — not by our intelligence services or fancy diplomatic footwork, important as these may be. Better intelligence will not, for instance, solve the problem of how to deal with proliferators of WMD. Even if the U.S. and its allies could track all possible WMD shipments — itself an extremely tall order — we would still have to choose whether to use force against them and thereby risk escalation. Had the intelligence on Iraq been correct, for instance, it would not have changed the core decision facing the country: whether to go to war against a

possible proliferator and regional threat. Likewise, better understanding of terrorist or insurgent groups will not by itself enable us to defeat them. Such groups must, once known and understood, still be broken through force.

The burden intelligence can bear is lighter but still an important one. Intelligence is a secondary part of a solid security system, a mechanism to provide warning, reduce accidents and misunderstanding, and give leaders a clearer picture from which to make decisions. Thus intelligence cannot relieve us from facing squarely the tough security policy questions that embroil us today. No one should point to better intelligence as an excuse for shutting down Guantanamo or enjoining the president's Terrorist Surveillance Program. Whether right or not, proponents of these moves need to be clear that less controversial intelligence methods will not make up the ground lost from cancelling these and similar initiatives.

This is not to say that intelligence could not lend support to a less "forward-leaning" strategy than has been adopted in the past five years. Indeed, if the U.S. returned to a strategy of deterrence, intelligence could play a very visible and useful, if secondary, role.[4] In such a system, intelligence would be embedded in a strategy that would emphasize overwhelming force and the will to use it in appropriate circumstances. Such a posture, recognizing the new world in which weapons of mass destruction will inevitably disseminate outwards to new states and downwards to sub-state actors, would provide for the safety of this country by developing "red lines" beyond which states would face the real possibility or even certainty of destructive American action. It would shift the burden of proof and liability for WMD use against the United States and its allies to those states which proliferate or do not prove to us that they are not proliferating. Within such a system, intelligence would have clear and important roles: keeping close tabs on those state and even sub-state programs not subject to transparent inspection by the U.S. and the international community, tracking possible proliferation moves, and analyzing employed WMD for origin and so forth in order to enable a devastating American response. Intelligence would then serve its natural roles of watchdog and forensic expert, giving our adversaries reason to fear that their hostile actions would not pass unnoticed. Though such a system would mark a significant change from the policies of the past five years, there is much to recommend it.

Eternal vigilance

THE REORDERING OF the nation's intelligence apparatus is one of the most significant national security reforms in recent history. When coupled with the "transformation" at the Department of

[4] For a fuller description of the author's view of such a strategy, see Elbridge Colby, "Restoring Deterrence," *Orbis* (Summer 2007), 413–428.

Defense, it is part of a major shift in the U.S. national security apparatus designed to address the new threats posed by the post-Cold War world. Like shifts in security structures in generations past, the underlying principles of these reforms and their application will be of great consequence. One need only look back at the opposing lessons that the French (and, following them, American) and German militaries drew and applied in the interwar years and their respective successes on the battlefield in the Second World War to see how important these reforms can be for the fate of nations.

Intelligence reform must first and foremost maintain a sense of proportion, of the limited possibilities of intelligence. Contingency and surprise are irremovable elements of any social system, and the international system is perhaps the finest example of this truth. Intelligence is most useful to its consumers, then, when it can marry secret information to deep expertise in thoughtful estimating — not when it pretends to a faux scientific certainty that neither the subject matter nor the available facts will permit. The Butler Report, the British version of the American WMD Commission, began its report with a wise quotation from Clausewitz: "Much of the intelligence that we receive in war is contradictory, even more of it is plain wrong, and most of it is fairly dubious. What one can require of an officer, under these circumstances, is a certain degree of discrimination, which can only be gained from knowledge of men and affairs and from good judgment. The law of probability must be his guide." If the American intelligence reform effort takes this wisdom as its guiding principle, then there is reason to think that our intelligence establishment will be able to meet the great challenges of the new world of threats that we face. But it will never overcome them entirely, for the intelligence community's mantra should be not that the truth will make us free, as CIA's is, but that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

Declinism

By Alan W. Dowd

The worries and warnings come from across the political spectrum and across the oceans. *New York Times* critic Nicolai Ouroussoff calls America "an empire enthralled with its own power and unaware that it is fading." Former Clinton administration official Charles Kupchan concludes that "American primacy is already past its peak." According to Joseph Nye, who served under Presidents Carter and Clinton, America's "soft power — its ability to attract others by the legitimacy of U.S. policies and the values that underlie them — is in decline."

Peggy Noonan, speechwriter for the most optimistic of presidents, Ronald Reagan, asserts that "in some deep fundamental way things have broken down and can't be fixed." Ivan Eland of the Independent Institute warns that America's military "overextension could hasten the decline of the United States as a superpower."

Matthew Parris of the *London Sunday Times* reports that the United States is "overstretched," romantically recalling the Kennedy presidency,

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Alan W. Dowd is a senior fellow at the Sagamore Institute for Policy Research and a contributing editor for the American Legion *magazine. His writing has appeared in* Policy Review, *the* Baltimore Sun, *the* Wall Street Journal Europe, *the* Washington Times, *the* Jerusalem Post *and other publications.*

when "America had the best arguments" and could use moral suasion rather than force to have its way in the world. From his vantage point in Shanghai, the *International Herald Tribune*'s Howard French worries about "the declining moral influence of the United States" over an emergent China.[1]

Are the declinists right about America's impending demise? Perhaps. But perhaps they're wrong: After all, declinism has a long history and a strange way of rearing its head when the U.S. is riding the waves of what Churchill called the "primacy of power." Indeed, it is during periods of U.S. ascendance — or perhaps better said, periods that subsequently are recognized as having been ascendant — that the declinists usually start sounding the (false) alarms. The "decline and fall of America" mantra has become an almost-decennial prophecy.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the University of Virginia's James Ceaser has written, it was widely accepted in Europe that "due chiefly to atmospheric conditions, in particular excessive humidity, all living things in the Americas were not only inferior to those found in Europe but also in a condition of decline."[2] Not surprisingly, the men who forged the American republic took issue with this early form of declinism. In fact, Ceaser notes, Alexander Hamilton rebutted Europe's pseudoscientific slander in *Federalist* No. 11. Pointing to "the arrogant pretensions" of Europe, Hamilton observed that "men admired as profound philosophers have in direct terms attributed to her inhabitants a physical superiority and have gravely asserted that all animals, and with them the human species, degenerate in America." He called on his countrymen to "vindicate the honor of the human race" by building "one great American system superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence, able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the new world!"

Descending and ascending

THE 13 COLONIES hugging the Atlantic seaboard would rally behind Hamilton's vision and redefine the nature of their connection with the Old World, but the revolutionary moment was short-lived. After defeating the British Empire in a brutal war for independence, the young republic was soundly swatted back into its place less than 30

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[1] Nicolai Ouroussoff, "Fear in a Soaring Tower," *New York Times* (June 30, 2005); Ivan Eland, "The Empire Strikes Out: The New Imperialism and Its Fatal Flaws," Cato Policy Analysis (November 26, 2002); Charles Kupchan, "The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the 21st century," Presentation at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs (February 27, 2003); Joseph Nye, "The Decline of America's Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2004); Peggy Noonan, "A Separate Peace," *Opinion Journal* (October 27, 2005); Howard W. French, "Behind the U.S. Decline of Influence in China," *International Herald Tribune* (March 22, 2006); Matthew Parris, "Ignore the Vanity of the Bushites, America's Might Is Draining Away," *London Times* (January 22, 2005).

[2] James Ceaser, "A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism," *Public Interest* (Summer 2003).

years later during the War of 1812. The war saw U.S. forces routed in Canada, U.S. sailors captured and impressed into duty on British warships, U.S. ports blockaded, and the U.S. Capitol and White House set ablaze by a British invasion force. When measured against Great Britain — and against its own position just a generation earlier — it appeared that the United States had declined drastically.

Two generations later, the Civil War would decapitate the national government and deform the nation. As Jay Winik's *April 1865* (HarperCollins, 2001) reminds us, the war not only called into question almost a hundred years of independent self-government, but also embodied decline in its purest sense. Winik recounts savage episodes of murder, mayhem, guerilla warfare, terrorism, vigilantism, and state-sanctioned brutality on a par with anything we condemn today — innocent civilians rounded up and summarily executed; cities burned to the ground; entire counties depopulated; mutilations and beheadings; all manner of torture. After Lincoln's murder, General Sherman openly feared America's slipping into anarchy. The Union general wondered "who was left on this continent to give order and shape to the now disjointed elements of the government." The war had rolled back American civilization, and recovery of what was lost was anything but certain. America had declined immeasurably — or perhaps better said, descended.

Americans suffered savage incidents of terrorism during the Civil War on a par with anything we condemn today.

Of course, Americans on both sides of the war would rebuild. By the early twentieth century, the United States would claim an empire of its own, with President Theodore Roosevelt using U.S. warships to flex American muscle in the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and Pacific and President Woodrow Wilson deploying American troops to Russia and Europe. Indeed, the rise of the United States in the global pecking order was aided by the economic and military devastation visited upon Europe by the Great War. Yet as historian Benjamin Rhodes has observed, America's "image abroad sank disastrously" during the Coolidge presidency, mainly due to European resentment over how the U.S. handled the role of global creditor.[3] Washington's mishandling of its newfound status as an economic-military power yielded a United States weaker than the nation that had tipped the balance in the Great War.

The U.S. failed to respond to the threats posed by the rise of power-projecting dictatorships in Europe and the Pacific — threats punctuated by Japan's attack on the USS *Panay* in December 1937 and numerous German attacks in the Atlantic and the Red Sea. As if to underscore American weak-

[3] Benjamin Rhodes, "The Republican Retreat from International Responsibilities," in Thomas Paterson, ed., *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 94.

ness, President Franklin Roosevelt famously sent word to Hitler in 1938 that "the United States has no political involvements in Europe." The German dictator got the message. Washington's diplomatic deference and military meekness, says Gerhard Weinberg in *A World At Arms* (Cambridge, 1994), confirmed Hitler's "assessment that this was a weak country, incapable, because of its racial mixture and feeble democratic government, of organizing and maintaining strong military forces."

Losing the postwar peace, losing the Cold War

In 1945, NOTES Derek Leebaert in *The Fifty Year Wound* (Little Brown, 2002), America had the "strut and swagger of a confident nation beating back tyrants. . . . The country was alive with strength and purpose." But by 1946, less than an eye-blink in the lifespan of a great power, everything had changed. The swagger was gone, replaced by uncertainty and worry.

Consider John Dos Passos's gloomy analysis of postwar Germany, which appeared in the January 7, 1946 *Life*. The U.S. had just flattened Imperial Japan and plowed into the heart of Hitler's Thousand Year Reich, yet Dos Passos could say "We've lost the peace. . . . Friend and foe alike look you accusingly in the face and tell you how bitterly they are disappointed in you as an American."

Pointing to the postwar division of Europe, which left half of the continent free and the other under Soviet domination, historian Michael Hunt has noted that "American policymakers opened this period of ostensible dominance by 'losing' Eastern Europe."[4] Leebaert adds texture to the portrait of postwar decline. "Ten months after the war's end," he writes, "not one U.S. Army division or Air Force group could be rated ready for combat." General Marshall himself called the postwar force "a hollow shell." In fact, as late as 1949, the U.S. had just 12 battle-ready tanks in Germany. Likewise, the evidence in occupied Japan pointed to America's virtual collapse as an enduring military power. Each division of the Eighth Army, Leebaert reports, was a thousand rifles short, the Fifth Air Force still had no jet fighters in 1949, and there were just 500 U.S. soldiers based in Korea. Thus, as world war gave way to Cold War, "The United States neither looked nor felt ready to contain anybody."

As the Cold War began in earnest, accusations over "Who lost China?" rang out across the U.S. Worries about America's decline soon spiked when communist forces rolled through Korea. General MacArthur's daring

[4] Michael Hunt, "American Decline and the Great Debate: A Historical Perspective," *SAIS Review*, (Summer/Fall 1990).

amphibious landing at Inchon would lead not to victory over the invaders but stalemate. Against a global backdrop of communist revolution, U.S. power seemed to be ebbing — and Washington seemed to be expending the power it had at an unsustainable clip.

Between the Potsdam Conference and the Berlin airlift, President Harry Truman committed the American people to support any nation "resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." He poured unheard-of sums into a standing peacetime army and oversaw the creation of the Department of Defense, National Security Agency, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and NATO to wage a new kind of war. He signed on to permanent defense treaties in Western Europe and the Pacific, opened the door to scores of other entangling alliances, repackaged war as police action, and justified it all because of the nature of the enemy and the omnipresent threat it posed. "If we falter in our leadership," he warned, "we may endanger the peace of the world — and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation."

Critics warned that Truman would weaken the Constitution, militarize U.S. foreign policy, and destroy the UN.

Truman's doctrine wasn't a ready-made road map for waging the Cold War, according to Leebaert. Instead, the Cold War's first four years — which coincided with Truman's first four years as president — "were filled with starts and stops rather than any considered policy or long-range goals." The result: "a patched-together postwar order."

Nor did Americans immediately rally around Truman's battle plan. As historian Walter LaFeber recalls, Truman's critics "tore apart" his doctrine and policies. They warned that Truman would weaken the Constitution, overinflate the presidency, militarize U.S. foreign policy and destroy the UN.

Still others argued that, despite all its spending, deployments and pronouncements, America's Cold War battle plan was not working. "Even in the early 1950s," as Barry Goldwater recalled in *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Victor Publishing, 1960), "it was clear that we were losing the Cold War." Lamenting "the deterioration of America's fortunes," the arch-conservative worried about an enemy with the will and capacity to "dominate absolutely every square mile of the globe" and warned that "a craven fear of death is entering the American consciousness." Indeed, Washington's nonreaction to the Soviet invasion of Hungary just three years after the armistice in Korea seemed to trace the outer limits of America's will, if not its power. "As the bloody tragedy played itself out on the streets of Budapest, America watched, waited and did nothing," Patrick Buchanan bitterly recounts in his introduction. "The sense of frustration and failure was all the greater because Moscow had taken the risk of war, and Moscow had won."

U.S. political power and prestige suffered yet another blow when Sputnik

rocketed into orbit in 1957 and Moscow took the high ground in the space race. Senator Henry Jackson called it "a national week of shame and danger." Senator Lyndon Johnson warned that "control of space means control of the world."

Of course, the U.S. faced terrestrial problems as well. "The Soviet Union increasingly appeared to be a triumphal industrial giant," Leebaert says. *The New York Times*, he notes, predicted that Soviet industrial output would exceed America's by the end of the twentieth century, and the CIA surmised that the Soviet economy would be three times larger than America's by 2000. "The overwhelming question," Leebaert writes of the 1950s, "was whether an apparently soft, even hedonistic American consumer society had the stamina for a long, inconclusive contest with communism."

Senator John Kennedy was worried about the answer to that question. Running for president in 1960, he pointed to a "missile gap" with the Soviet Union as evidence of America's weakening defenses. "We are . . . gambling with our survival," he warned. "This year's defense budget is our last chance to do something about it," he added for dramatic effect.[5]

Among those echoing Kennedy was his Democratic colleague Joseph Clark. Under the headline "U.S. Decline Seen in Eisenhower Era," *The New York Times* reported on a May 1960 speech in which Clark derided "timid leadership in both foreign and domestic affairs." Like Goldwater, he expressed worries that "America's world role had shrunk" and called for a "build-up in American military muscle."

Yet even after Kennedy had swooped in to save America from decline, it continued to look as if the U.S. had fallen fast and hard from its World War II perch. Ineptitude at the Bay of Pigs and irresolute responses to earlier communist challenges would conspire to invite the very thing Churchill had warned against in his Cold War preamble: "temptations to a trial of strength."[6]

In fact, by building missile bases and airstrips on Cuba, Moscow was exploiting a gaping hole in America's veneer of invincibility. The ensuing Cuban missile crisis merely exposed that gap to the rest of the world and prompted some governments to develop alternative sources of deterrence: Shaken by the notion that, in LaFeber's clever phrase, Washington had dragged them "uncomfortably close to annihilation without representation," the French and others grew ever more independent.

The trial of strength over Cuba would precede a trial by fire in Vietnam. In *Modern Times* (HarperCollins, 1983), Paul Johnson calls Vietnam and the consequent crisis of confidence "America's suicide attempt." During the Vietnam War, Washington entered into 16 bombing pauses and 72 peace

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[5] John Kennedy, "Senator Kennedy Presses for More Military Spending to Close the Missile Gap," in Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, 300.

[6] Winston Churchill, The Iron Curtain Speech, March 5, 1946, in David Cannadine, ed., *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: The Speeches of Winston Churchill* (Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 307.

initiatives. These self-imposed restraints, as Johnson observes, were "interpreted by friend and foe alike as evidence not of humanity, but of guilt and lack of righteous conviction" — and decline. The war's final chapter, which saw North Vietnam violate the peace accords with impunity and Washington beat a hasty retreat out of Saigon, would be "the gravest and most humiliating defeat in American history."

In the midst of this macro-humiliation, there were countless smaller humiliations, each serving as a piece in the dark mosaic of American decline:

- French leader Charles de Gaulle withdrew from NATO's military structure in 1966 and afterwards pursued a separate peace with Moscow.
- Western Europe averted its gaze from the agony of its patron and protector. Not even Britain would lend a hand in Vietnam.
- When Israel called for help and the U.S. answered during the 1973 war, NATO turned its back. Only Portugal would grant overflight rights to U.S. supply planes.
- North Korea openly challenged and mocked U.S. power during the Vietnam debacle. Pyongyang seized the USS *Pueblo* in international waters and tortured its crew for 11 months, shot down a U.S. plane in international airspace, and, according to Leebaert, "hacked to death two U.S. officers in the 38th parallel's demilitarized zone."
- In the American sphere, Venezuela sided with OPEC and nationalized U.S. firms; left-wing forces ousted a U.S.-backed government in Nicaragua; and Argentina broke ranks and shipped grain to Moscow.

After Vietnam, the United States appeared to be in a geopolitical freefall. Amid recession, oil embargoes and assassinations, Johnson says, Soviet leaders referred to "the deepening general crisis" in the United States, and Beijing dismissed America as a power in decline. Even Washington seemed to believe America's best days were behind it. Leebaert records an exchange between Admiral Elmo Zumwalt and Henry Kissinger in which Kissinger concluded the United States had "passed its high point like so many other civilizations," adding that he was trying "to persuade the Russians to give us the best deal we can get."

It wasn't a very good deal. Coming on the heels of Vietnam, détente was an expression of American weakness. A 1976 report by Donald Rumsfeld conceded that in the event of war, America's ability to reinforce NATO or come to the aid of Japan or Israel was in doubt.[7] Indeed, according to Johnson, "America's decline in the Seventies seemed even more precipitous. in contrast with the apparent solidity and self-confidence of the Soviet regime." By 1971, he notes, Moscow had bypassed Washington in numbers of land-based and sub-based nuclear missiles. The USSR built some 1,300 warships between 1962 and 1977, the U.S. just 302; and while Washington retracted and retreated, Moscow's proxies established them-

[7] Paul Johnson, *Modern Times* (HarperCollins, 1983), 672.

selves across the Third World.

"We've become fearful to compete with the Soviet Union," one presidential candidate concluded in a campaign speech. "I want to see our nation return to a posture and an image and a standard to make us proud once again . . . we ought to be a beacon for nations who search for peace and who search for freedom."[8] The words could have been spoken by Ronald Reagan, but in fact it was Jimmy Carter, who three years later would deliver a sermon to the American people essentially blaming them for American decline. Johnson takes note of Carter's conclusion that America's capacity to shape global events was "very limited." This was never more apparent than during Iran's unchallenged violation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran, which would mark the postwar nadir of American power and, it appeared, the fulfillment of declinist prophecies.

Bipolar disorder

"The country did not elect Reagan out of serious belief that he would change things," Derek Leebaert argues, "but because it felt cornered. If embassies could be seized with impunity, if OPEC could gear up to new heights of effrontery, if the United States was behaving as if its liberties depended on the People's Republic of China, then America was indeed looking like a 'pitiful giant' and perhaps well on the way to becoming one."

As a candidate, Reagan ticked off a seemingly endless list of U.S. vulnerabilities and outright defeats in the global conflict with Moscow: Soviet troops in Afghanistan, failure in the arms race, American hostages languishing in Iran, propaganda defeats at the UN, faltering leadership in Europe. Reagan's solution was simple. Rather than accommodating Moscow through détente or containing it behind curtains and parallels, the United States would defeat the Soviet system once and for all: "We win," he said. "They lose."

Even as Reagan was reformulating America's grand strategy, those in the declinist school clung tenaciously to their arguments. In his treatise on decline, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Random House, 1987) Paul Kennedy wondered whether the country's electoral and political system had the capacity to allow policymakers to reformulate the "grand strategy in light of the larger, uncontrollable changes taking place in world affairs." His implication was not just that the U.S. political system was outmoded, but that American power was outmatched.

The book laid out in grim detail how the United States was tumbling toward the same fate that had felled the dominant powers of earlier cen-

[8] Jimmy Carter, "Jimmy Carter's Critique of the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger Foreign Policy," in Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, 676–677.

turies; how "the American share of world power has been declining relatively faster than Russia's over the past few decades;" and how U.S. defense outlays and commitments were unsustainable and were pushing the United States toward the same "imperial overstretch" that had undone earlier powers.

From Kennedy's perspective, U.S. interests were too numerous, too widespread and too expensive to sustain. The bipolar system, he said, was giving way to a multipolar one. Thus, he reasoned, "there was a need to manage affairs so that the relative erosion of the United States takes place slowly and smoothly."

Kennedy's requiem was representative of a chorus of declinist predictions in the mid- to late 1980s.

- Writing just a few years ahead of Kennedy, Richard Barnet declared that the American Century had "lasted about 26 years." He mocked the Reagan administration for promising to reverse "the stunning decline of American power that marked the 1970s," for "alarming millions in the United States and Europe," and, finally, for retreating from its hard line with Moscow.
- In 1988, Flora Lewis sighed that "Talk of U.S. decline is real in the sense that the U.S. can no longer pull all the levers of command or pay all the bills."
- Even in trying to deflect the declinists, James Schlesinger conceded in 1988 that the U.S. was "no longer economically the preponderant power . . . no longer militarily the dominant power . . . no longer can achieve more or less whatever it desires."
- "The signs of decline are evident to those who care to see them," declared Peter Passell in 1990, noting that the U.S. had lost its competitive edge and was losing its battle with the Japanese juggernaut.
- "Europeans and Asians," wrote Anthony Lewis in 1990, "are already finding confirmation of their suspicion that the United States is in decline."
- Citing America's dependence on foreign sources for energy and "crucial weaknesses" in the military, Tom Wicker concluded "that maintaining superpower status is becoming more difficult — nearly impossible — for the United States."[9]

Other declinists of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Leebaert recalls, were predicting that the last decade of the twentieth century would be when "the American empire ran out of gas" and "took the British route to second-class economic status."

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[9] Tom Wicker, "The Super Concept," *New York Times* (November 25, 1990); Lewis, "When You Believe in Lies," *New York Times* (October 8, 1990); Passell, "America's Position in the Economic Race: What the Numbers Show and Conceal," *New York Times* (March 4, 1990); Flora Lewis, "Hard Talk Is Needed," *New York Times* (August 28, 1988); "Schlesinger, "Debunking the Myth of Decline," *New York Times* (June 19, 1988); Barnet, "The Decline of American Sway," *New York Times* (July 18, 1982).

Moreover, says Samuel Huntington, American decline dominated academic discussions in 1988. By 1990, political scientists and pundits were borrowing Kennedy's premise and quipping that the U.S. and USSR had waged the Cold War, but Japan and Germany had won it. In 1993, historian William Pfaff looked back upon America's "soaring national ascent, and descent, between 1900 and the century's end" and concluded that "superpowerdom" had deformed the United States and delivered "better results for others than for itself."[10]

Of course, it was the Soviet Union that had declined and collapsed under the weight of empire. In an unfortunate stroke of timing for Kennedy, his analysis hit bookstores not long before the United States emerged as the unrivaled, unchallenged leader of something not known since the days of Rome — a unipolar world. Leebaert calls it "a world unrecognizable from Professor Kennedy's one-dimensional perspective," noting that Kennedy "overlooked inconvenient facts, as information technologies forced decentralization and demanded the sort of adaptivity made for America."

Impotent or imperial?

Indeed, the U.S. surged into the 1990s, its global primacy punctuated by the military rout of Iraq in 1991, the collapse of Soviet communism, and a mastery of the Information-Age economy. Yet, as President George H.W. Bush expressed it in *A World Transformed* (Knopf, 1998), the U.S. was forced to defend its relevance in post-Cold War Europe in the same way an aging employee on the verge of being downsized might defend his job: "In our discussion about NATO," Bush wrote, "I explained why it was important for the United States to stay in Europe."

He succeeded in convincing the Europeans, but Americans remained unsure about the proper place of a superpower with no rival. This uncertainty was accentuated by Washington's increasingly allergic reaction to post-Cold War challenges:

- Two successive U.S. administrations seemed helpless to stop the vivisection of Bosnia. As Pfaff notes, the West's failure to stanch the bleeding in Yugoslavia "dealt a brutal blow to the idea that democracies possessed the capacity, or the will, to enlarge that zone of pacification and cooperation created inside the western political community. It even raised the question of whether that achievement would last." As the leader of the West, the U.S. was weakened and scarred by that failure.
- Disorganized clans were able to chase the mighty U.S. military out of Somalia, and the U.S. then averted its gaze from Rwanda's machete massacre.

[10] See Samuel Huntington, "No Exit," *National Interest* (Fall 1989); William Pfaff, *The Wrath of Nations* (Simon and Schuster, 1993), 28.

- North Korea crashed into the nuclear club; India and Pakistan shook the subcontinent with a spasm of nuclear tests; and China conducted a reckless foreign policy of gunboat diplomacy in the Taiwan Straits.
- Even in America's backyard, Washington dithered over how to remove a scrawny junta in Haiti. "Rarely," recalled David Halberstam in *War in a Time of Peace* (Scribner, 2001), "had the United States looked so impotent."

In each instance, the U.S. played the role of spectator or prisoner of events. Friend and foe took notice. As the Balkans hemorrhaged, French President Jacques Chirac concluded that "the position of leader of the free world is vacant." Even after U.S. forces intervened, questions lingered about America's strength and stomach for global leadership. After the 78-day war from 30,000 feet over Kosovo, wrote Halberstam, Army Secretary Louis Caldera worried that Americans were more willing to take casualties when training for war than when waging it.

Osama bin Laden came to the same conclusion. From his perspective, America's retreat from Beirut in the 1980s, Mogadishu in the 1990s, and Yemen in 2000 was evidence of decline. "America exited dragging its tail in failure, defeat, and ruin, caring for nothing," bin Laden preached. "The extent of your impotence and weaknesses became very clear."[11]

Decline and conquer

To be sure, the U.S. faces challenges, competitors and threats that could erode its global position: China and India are ascending economically; the world abounds with asymmetrical threats that have the capacity to undermine the liberal order that Washington has sought to spread for generations; and Americans find themselves in the midst of yet another "great ideological conflict," in the words of the president's most recent security strategy document.

Today as in the past, U.S. primacy is neither inevitable nor a birthright. It is a burden that must be justified and shouldered anew by each generation in its own way. Even so, and notwithstanding Iraq, this is an unusual moment to diagnose the United States as a nation in decline. Just as the past is littered with unfulfilled predictions by the declinists, the present is teeming with evidence of unprecedented U.S. power.

From peace-keeping to war-fighting, deterrence to disaster relief, it is the U.S. military that the world turns to when in need. Johns Hopkins professor Fouad Ajami has noted, "The world rails against the United States, yet embraces its protection, its gossip and its hipness."[12] Especially its protec-

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[11] See bin Laden's Fatwa Against America (August 1996); CNN, "Transcript of Bin Laden's October interview," (February 5, 2002).

[12] Fouad Ajami, "The Falseness of Anti-Americanism," *Foreign Policy* (Sept/Oct 2003).

tion: More than half the globe enjoys overt defense and security treaties with the United States. The U.S. military is the last (and first) line of defense for most of the rest.

Of course, the U.S. military does more than protect and defend: In the span of about 23 months, it overthrew two enemy regimes located on the other side of the planet and replaced them with popularly supported governments. Even as American forces deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, they kept watch on the Korean peninsula and kept the sea-lanes open for the oil and goods that feed a truly global economy; did the dirty work of counterterrorism from Tora Bora to Timbuktu; and responded to disasters of biblical proportion in places as disparate as Louisiana and Sumatra.

From peacekeeping to war-fighting, deterrence to disaster relief, it is the U.S. military the world turns to when in need.

This does not seem to be the handiwork of a faltering empire. Indeed, no other military could attempt such a feat of global multitasking. "The British empire," writes Niall Ferguson in *Colossus* (Allen Lane, 2004), "never enjoyed this kind of military lead over the competition . . . [and] never dominated the full spectrum of military capabilities the way the United States does today."

Yet the declinists say America's overseas commitments and consequent deployments are an indication of waning. Paul Kennedy warned in the 1980s that the U.S. was susceptible to "imperial overstretch" due to its overseas commitments. Later, Thomas Paterson maintained that military interventions in Central America during the latter stages of the Cold War "attested not to U.S. strength but to the loosening of its imperial net."[13] Today, Matthew Parris argues that "America's might is draining away" by listing some of the disparate places U.S. troops are deployed.

As to the charge that the U.S. is overstretched, Ferguson reminds us that the United States had 3.4 million men on active duty in the 1950s, which represented a sizable 2.1 percent of America's population (around 160 million at the time). By 1963, Leebaert adds, the U.S. had a million troops "stationed at more than 200 foreign bases." Today, by comparison, the U.S. has 1.4 million men and women on active duty (out of a population of 300 million). Even when activated reserve and National Guard components are factored in, only a fraction of a percent of the U.S. population is under arms today — and just 350,000 U.S. troops are deployed overseas.

Moreover, while the declinists claim that the U.S. military is too expensive, they seldom note that the current defense budget accounts for just 3.5 percent of GDP. That's less than the U.S. spent on defense as a percentage of GDP at any time during the Cold War — and far less than the 30 to 40 per-

[13] Paterson, "Superpower Decline and Hegemonic Survival," *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*, 518.

cent spent during World War II. In fact, Ferguson notes, the cost of the U.S. military was 10 percent of GDP in the 1950s. One reason for this is the enormous size of the U.S. economy. Gerard Baker of the *Times* of London notes that the U.S. economy will be twice as big as Europe's by 2021, and that, compared to China, the U.S. is adding "twice as much in absolute terms to global output."[14] Ferguson also notes that the U.S. share of global productivity "exceeds the highest share of global output ever achieved by Britain by a factor of more than two."

In short, with a much larger economy, much larger population, and much smaller global footprint, the America of today is no more "overstretched" than the America of 1950 or 1970 or 1990.

Nor is it weaker on the diplomatic front.

Consider the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative, which was born just weeks after the fall of Baghdad. To date, some 60 nations have signed on to the PSI to strengthen their capacity to secure the seas and intercept weapons of mass destruction and their precursors while in transit.

Whether or not we Americans like everything our culture produces, its attractiveness around the world is undeniable.

Consider the U.S.-led Container Security Initiative, which deploys U.S. Customs agents to the world's largest, busiest ports to screen goods and containers coming into the United States. Today, 43 ports in dozens of nations participate in the program, creating a ring of security well beyond America's shores.

Consider Libya's preemptive surrender of its WMD arsenal in late 2003, which happened without the firing of a shot and, tellingly, came after Saddam's overthrow and capture.

Consider North Korea, which has been a challenge of the highest order for nearly six decades. It is a challenge that the current administration, like the previous ten, has not been able to fully solve — an understatement underscored by Pyongyang's penchant for testing missiles and brandishing nukes. But if diplomacy is an end in itself, as so many critics of the current administration seem to believe, then North Korea represents an example of America's diplomatic power. Recall that U.S. diplomacy cajoled four other regional powers into talks, pressured North Korea into a multilateral setting (which it opposed) and then extracted Pyongyang's promise to give up its nuclear weapons. Whether the North Koreans end up keeping this promise is a subject for another essay. What is relevant here is that Washington pursued a major policy objective to persuade all of the regional powers of its importance to *them* and to secure a promise from North Korea. In the 1990s, that was hailed by many in the foreign-policy establishment as

[14] Gerard Baker, "America's Economic Hegemony is Safe," *London Times* (April 25, 2006).

something to applaud. In the 2000s, it was dismissed as evidence of U.S. weakness.

With regard to "soft power," from McDonald's to Microsoft, American culture is in high demand. Whether or not we Americans like everything our culture produces, its attractiveness around the world is undeniable — and yet another expression of U.S. power. We see this in the global popularity of Google, which was created by a pair of Stanford students without any government help at all but so dominates the web that the European Union is pouring $294 million into birthing an answer; in the PC primacy of Dell and HP; in the 330 million (and counting) PCs running Microsoft Windows ; in Apple iTunes, which has swept into 20 countries and displaced local powers such as Japan's own Sony.[15] We see this, too, in the life and times of Yao Ming, who was recognized in 2005 as China's "vanguard worker" — an honor once awarded to citizens wholeheartedly embracing communism — yet is a Texas multimillionaire who plays for the Houston Rockets.

Indeed, America has a magnetic pull on peoples of every race, religion and region. Thirty-two million of those who live in the U.S. were born somewhere else, notes Ferguson. When they arrive, these would-be Americans find a culture eager to graft in the new and the different — a nation where a refugee from Czechoslovakia could be entrusted to oversee U.S. foreign policy as secretary of state, where an Austrian bodybuilder could become governor of the most populous state, where an Afghan immigrant could represent U.S. interests in Kabul and Baghdad, where a Polish immigrant would be asked to head the Joint Chiefs or restore what 9/11 maimed.

Land of wonders

"DECLINISM PERFORMS A useful historical function," Huntington has observed. "It provides a warning and a goad to action in order to head off and reverse the decline that it says is taking place."[16] At its best, then, it is an expression of the American tendency toward self-criticism and continual improvement. This is a restless nation. Its capacity for change, its desire for change, its willingness to reevaluate and reassess itself make it easy to extrapolate periodic corrections or momentary uncertainties into downward trends — declinism at its worst. Perhaps this is why its practitioners find themselves forced to revise and defer their predictions again and again.

Writing when America was still young, Tocqueville described this country as "a land of wonders, in which everything is in constant motion and every

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[15] Justin McCurry, "iPod in Japan: Apple Plays Winning Tune in Sony's Backyard," *The Guardian* (August 19, 2005).

[16] Huntington, "No Exit."

change seems an improvement."[17] Closer to our times, Yale historian C. Vann Woodward called optimism "a national philosophy in America."[18] America's openness to change grows out of its optimism, which explains why most Americans do not subscribe to declinism's pessimism.

Given the breadth and depth of history, it would be foolish to think that U.S. power might not some day recede like a setting sun. Still, given our history so far, it would be just as foolish to overlook the less than stellar record of the declinists and conclude that "some day" is now.

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[17] Tocqueville, in Glorya Hale, ed., *Celebrating America* (MetroBooks 2002).

[18] *American Historical Review*, 46:1 (October, 1960).

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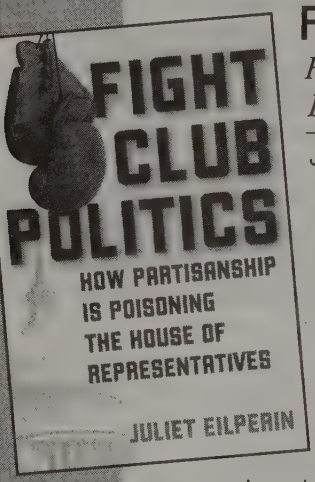

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BOOKS

Vulgarizing the War Debate

By PETER BERKOWITZ

STEPHEN HOLMES. *The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to Terror*. CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS. 384 PAGES. $30.00

WAR PLACES A premium on knowledge. Certainly it's better to have more troops, bigger guns, and more powerful bombs and rockets. Yet nothing we have learned about human nature, politics, and battle in the past two and a half millennia calls into question the wisdom of the oldest classic of strategic thought, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself, but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

Indeed, our struggle against the varieties of Islamic extremism has only confirmed the importance of Sun Tzu's sage advice. We have suffered setbacks because we have been slow to appreciate that our grand strategy, our armed forces, and our diplomatic corps were not designed for the challenges presented by nonstate threats and asymmetric warfare. And we have incurred self-inflicted wounds because we have failed to grasp that neither our categories of criminal law nor the laws of war easily cover terrorists' strategic aims and characteristic tactics. Moreover, ten years after Osama bin Laden declared war on the U.S., we remain poorly informed about the jihadists' language, culture, sectarian differences, political grievances, and religious aspirations.

In these testing circumstances, scholars have a special role to play. Trained, ostensibly, in serious and systematic inquiry and devoted, presumably, to the pursuit of accurate and objective knowledge, scholars should be uniquely well-equipped to step back, set aside partisan posturing, and place the September 11 attacks and America's multifaceted response to jihadist terrorism in context.

Many, particularly in political science and law, have the opportunity to pursue their professional obligations and to contribute to the public good by analyzing the cultural, social, economic, political, and religious dimensions of Islamic extremism and authoritarian government in the Muslim world. They can devise better procedures under the Constitution for the detention, interrogation, and prosecution of unlawful enemy combatants. They can rethink the body of international law known as

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Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and teaches at George Mason University School of Law. His writings are posted at www.PeterBerkowitz.com.

the laws of war and adjust it to an age in which not only nation-states but also nonstate actors are capable of threatening a country's territorial integrity and political sovereignty. They can examine our unwieldy collection of intelligence agencies — whose performance, dating back to the Cold War, has left much to be desired — and propose reforms to improve them. They can explore the proper role of the federal courts, which must find a way to hold the president accountable and keep Congress within constitutional bounds while preserving energy in the executive and democratic legitimacy in the legislature. And they can develop workable rules and regulations, consistent with constitutional guarantees of individual liberty, to govern the electronic surveillance and data mining that are crucial to U.S. national security.

FOR AN INSTANT, it appears Stephen Holmes agrees that at this critical moment, scholars have a special role to play. A professor at New York University School of Law and research director at the law school's Center on Law and Security, he declares in his opening lines that his book

> is an attempt to understand and explain America's reckless response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. It builds on many previous efforts to get the story straight about the al Qaeda attack, the invasion and occupation of Iraq, and American counterterrorism policy more generally. Learning how to think clearly about the 9/11 provocation and America's response to it is an obvious first step toward correcting the tragically misguided course on which the nation has embarked. What follows is my modest contribution to that collective and ongoing endeavor.

But Holmes's commitment to "understand and explain" and "to get the story straight" is belied by the very sentences in which he emphatically proclaims it. For it is chillingly misleading to refer to the bloodiest surprise attack on American soil as a "provocation," as Holmes does not only this once but repeatedly. The slaughter of 3,000 innocents, the assault on the nation's commercial and military infrastructure, and the infliction of damage whose cost is estimated to be between $80 billion and $500 billion were not an insult or a taunt but rather an operation in a continuing war against the U.S. that Osama bin Laden first publicly declared in 1996.

Indeed, contrary to the brief obeisance Holmes offers to high-minded scholarly goals, his book presents a no-holds-barred polemic against the Bush administration and its neoconservative supporters. Along the way he produces shrewd observations about the psychology of the terrorists, accurately identifies grave American missteps in the war on terror, and makes incisive arguments about the long- and short-term benefits of safeguarding law, due process, and individual rights in the battle against Muslim extremism. Yet despite ringing endorsements from eminent academicians such as Yale Law School's Bruce Ackerman, Columbia University's Jon Elster, and Princeton University's Paul Starr, and despite Holmes's assurance concerning the honorable provenance of his ideas, most of which, he notes,

"were first elaborated in the Law and Security Colloquium at New York University School of Law," his book blurs facts, warps opponents' positions, engages in farfetched speculations about key officials' motives, and contradicts its own central lines of argument. Holmes's fierce intelligence and acerbic wit are displayed on every page, but he does not ultimately employ them in the service of understanding, explaining, and getting the story straight. To the contrary. In his zeal to convict the Bush administration of comprehensive incompetence and sustained malfeasance in responding to the September 11 attacks, Holmes reinforces pervasive prejudices, compounds common misunderstandings, and throws fuel on the flames of partisan discord. In the process, his book raises a crucial question: What kind of academic elite encourages — indeed, celebrates — the publication of a venomous polemic in scholarly garb at the very moment when the public interest demands a serious and systematic examination?

Holmes is one of the nation's preeminent political theorists and also one of our premier progressive polemicists. In *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (1984) and in *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (1995), he showed, through learned historical reconstruction and supple theoretical analysis, the vitality of the liberal tradition, the sources of its strength, and the enduring appeal of its doctrine. In between, in 1993, he published *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism*, in which he sought to demonstrate that liberals have nothing to learn from their leading critics, especially their conservative critics. To make his case, he substituted caricature for interpretation and mockery for analysis.[1]

His new book showcases Holmes at his best and at his worst. It consists of thirteen "reconceived and rewritten versions" of previously published essays, along with an original introduction and conclusion. The good Holmes illuminates the complexity of the jihadists' motives, the failure of the Bush administration to prepare for the aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the utopian shortsightedness to which humanitarian interventionists and liberal hawks have been prone, the indispensable role of the federal courts and Congress in strengthening the executive in wartime by keeping him accountable for his conduct, the benefits to powerful nations of the restraints and predictability created by international law and international institutions, and the need to make the securing of fissile material and the interdicting of nuclear smuggling central to the war on terror. Unfortunately, the precious opportunity to reconceive and rewrite essays originally prepared for partisan magazines (the *American Prospect*, the *London Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and the *New Republic*) does not prevent the bad Holmes from engaging in intellectual dirty tricks, provided they contribute to the depiction of Bush administration figures and neoconservative supporters as clueless or depraved or both.

The book draws its title from an argument he advances in the first and

[1] See my "Liberal Zealotry," *Yale Law Journal* 103 (1994).

longest chapter, "Did Religious Extremism Cause 9/11?" According to Holmes, the September 11 attacks should be seen as a kind of matador's cape waved by Osama bin Laden to enrage the United States and provoke it to expend blood and treasure and eventually exhaust itself in a reckless quest for revenge. In fact, he contends, bin Laden's strategy has proved successful: The Bush administration has responded to 9/11 like a maddened bull, culminating in the calamitous invasion of Iraq. To be clear, Holmes is not making the reasonable argument that terrorists seek to sow fear and generate overreaction, but the sensational claim that the Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq was a catastrophic mistake of the very sort bin Laden sought to induce. The claim does not survive scrutiny.

Holmes's matador's cape theory runs counter to the dominant view, which is well supported in jihadist writings and bin Laden's pre-war pronouncements. Much as Muhammad viewed Mecca before he conquered it in 630, al Qaeda saw the U.S. in the 1990s as a decadent, tired, and infidel giant incapable of marshaling the strength and will needed to defeat a determined foe. Holmes's theory, in contrast, holds that the U.S. was suffused with bullish passion and pride.

The major piece of evidence Holmes adduces on behalf of his theory is a slender reed on which to hang a dramatic revision of the conventional wisdom: He cites Osama bin Laden's boast that it is "easy for us to provoke and bait this administration." But he lifts this sentence fragment from a meandering bin Laden statement made public in late October 2004, more than 18 months after the invasion of Iraq, that appears to owe as much to Michael Moore's *Farenheit 9/11*, released earlier that year, as to reality. Al Qaeda sent the statement — videotaped somewhere in the mountainous wilderness of Afghanistan or Pakistan — to al Jazeera with the apparent intention of swinging the close American election, only a week away, from Bush to Kerry. Al Jazeera promptly posted a full transcript on the internet. In the course of his denunciation of Bush, bin Laden explained how the president had fallen into al Qaeda's trap:

> All that we have mentioned has made it easy for us to provoke and bait this administration. All that we have to do is to send two mujahidin to the furthest point east to raise a piece of cloth on which is written al Qaeda, in order to make the generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic, and political losses without their achieving for it anything of note other than some benefits for their private companies.
>
> This is in addition to our having experience in using guerilla warfare and the war of attrition to fight tyrannical superpowers, as we, alongside the mujahidin, bled Russia for ten years, until it went bankrupt and was forced to withdraw and defeat.

These are boastful words indeed from a leader who, three years after coalition forces had destroyed his terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, toppled his Taliban protectors, and liberated the 25 million Afghani Muslims among

whom he had been living, had himself been forced to flee and was still living underground and on the run. They are not words to be trusted.

But instead of considering the extent to which bin Laden's brazen pronouncements might serve as after-the-fact rationalizations designed to put his desperate circumstances in the best light, Holmes credulously takes them at face value. And yet he certainly knows better. Elsewhere in the same chapter he asserts that bin Laden and his confederates in Afghanistan "have been living somewhat disconnected from reality" and insists that their utterances must *not* be taken at face value:

> After all, they have been hiding like hunted animals for years, surrounded only by people who think like themselves, insulated from the kind of heterogeneous community that can provide mentally stabilizing sanity checks. It would not be surprising, therefore, if their worldview contained some unrealistic beliefs.

Holmes's account of bin Laden's strategy falters for a second reason: As he notes, bin Laden decided to proceed with the 9/11 attacks in late 1999. But in 1999 bin Laden could not have counted on George W. Bush's becoming president. And there is every reason to suppose that had Al Gore been president, America would not have invaded Iraq as part of the response to 9/11, which for Holmes is the principal instance of U.S. overreaching. Indeed, by the beginning of 2001, how could the U.S. have looked to bin Laden like anything but a sluggish giant all but impossible to rouse, given the withdrawal from Somalia in 1994 and the lack of sustained or effective response to the 1993 plot to bring down the World Trade Center, to the 1998 suicide bombing attacks on the U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, and to the 2000 suicide bombing attack on the USS *Cole*? Moreover, the obvious aim of bin Laden's crude propaganda was to impel American voters to choose Kerry over Bush, suggesting, contrary to Holmes, that Bush's aggressive response to 9/11 was not what bin Laden sought. And even if bin Laden had devised the 9/11 attacks to induce America to undertake extravagant military adventures that would eventually plunge the nation into bankruptcy, the strategy certainly appears to have failed. The economy continues to boom, and the cost of our military response to 9/11 — including Iraq, which is responsible for about 70 percent of that spending — will total, according to Congressional Budget Office estimates, around $750 billion by the end of fiscal year 2008; that averages 2.5 percent a year of America's nearly $3 trillion-a-year budget.[2]

There is greater evidence for the proposition advanced by Holmes that by means of the September 11 attacks al Qaeda also sought to "awaken the sleeping umma [Muslim nation]." To support it, he cites journalist Alan Cullison, who discovered a trove of documents on an al Qaeda desktop computer, "used mostly by Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin

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[2] Robert Samuelson, "A $2 Trillion Footnote?" *Washington Post* (February 28, 2007).

Laden's top deputy," which Cullison bought from dealers in Afghanistan in November 2001 shortly after coalition forces toppled the Taliban.[3] These documents show, Holmes contends, that "By tossing a stone, the 9/11 plotters apparently hoped to loose a worldwide Islamic insurgency against insufficiently pious Muslim rulers as well as against non-Muslim forces occupying Muslim lands." Unfortunately for Holmes, if this account of al Qaeda's strategy is correct, it implies that al Qaeda thought in religious categories and hoped to exploit transnational Muslim religious beliefs, which delivers a fatal blow to the overarching thesis of his first chapter that the religious dimension of jihadist terror is separable from and largely peripheral to the psychological and political dimension.

Holmes proceeds oblivious to the contradiction. As he sees it, the religious dimension of jihadist terrorism has been greatly exaggerated, particularly by President Bush and his supporters and enablers. Although "religious teachings can intensify and coordinate preexistent anger," they are for Holmes a secondary factor in explaining jihadist terrorism. To be sure, religious practice — terrorist cell members gathering in mosques, meeting in Islamic study rooms at universities, and the like — can be instrumentally significant. For those who planned and carried out the 9/11 attacks, such activities "helped maintain a veil of secrecy around the plot." And engaging in ritual prayer obstructs thought and induces obedience, creating drones that can be exploited by crafty leaders. But it is the psychological and political causes of jihadist terrorism, which have been neglected, that are primary. Much of the violent Islamist reaction against the West, according to Holmes, gives expression to an all-too-human desire for revenge. Cunning religious leaders exploit psychologically disturbed and politically alienated young Muslims by convincing them to destroy American lives and the American way of life for humiliations visited on the Muslim nation by the West. We must take seriously, he admonishes, the Muslim accusation that America in particular has perpetrated grave crimes and injustices against the Muslim world. Yet this is precisely what Holmes himself fails to do.

To take the Islamists' accusations seriously, it is necessary to grasp the primacy of the religious dimension. The grave crimes and injustices with which they charge not only America but also Israel and the West derive much of their force from an extremist interpretation of Islamic teachings. Islamists seek the eradication of Israel not only for secular political reasons but also because of the religious belief, rooted in Islamic law, that Jews must be subordinate to Muslims in Muslim lands. Islamist opposition to American troops in Saudi Arabia does not stem only from a determination to repel alleged American colonial ambitions but also from the religious principle that Muslims alone must rule the land that is home to Islam's two holiest cities. Western might, Western liberty, and Western culture are affronts to militant Muslims that elicit their envy and resentment not only because of their failure to modernize and their depen-

[3] Alan Cullison, "Inside Al Qaeda's Hard Drive," *Atlantic* (September 2004).

dence on Western technology and attraction to Western ways, but also because of their belief that the Koran teaches that Muslims deserve and are destined to rule the world.

Holmes's fundamental error in analyzing Muslim extremism is to draw a false dichotomy between religion and politics. It is certainly a dichotomy rejected by Islam, which is based on a comprehensive religious law that orders all aspects of life. Particularly for the extremists, politics and religion are inseparably intertwined. But even for the non-extremists, it makes no sense to distinguish sharply, as Holmes is bent on doing, between Muslim political and psychological grievances and Muslim religious grievances, since by definition the Muslim nation — 1.4 billion people strong, the vast majority of whom are not Arab and do not live in the Middle East — is constituted not by territory or political sovereignty but by religious belief. Holmes asserts that "the crimes that the jihadists sometimes hype as crimes against God are invariably crimes against the Arab people or a Muslim nation." True, but these crimes against the Arab people or a Muslim nation — he should have added *the* Muslim nation, or the community of all believers — almost invariably reflect transgressions that are magnified, if not defined, by Muslim law.

Similarly, Holmes argues that "concrete historical events, not some underlying religious Manichaeism, explain why the 9/11 plotters directed their fury against the United States." Committing the very error he imputes to others, Holmes propounds his own Manichaean theory, erecting a wall between inefficacious religious beliefs and causally decisive historical events. Yet in the same chapter he observes that bin Laden chose to focus on America "as the enemy because it was the best candidate to rally and hold together an incoherent international grab bag of aspiring jihadists and their hangers-on," suggesting that bin Laden could not have succeeded but for the religious significance his militant Muslim followers attached to America.

Al Qaeda saw the U.S. in the 1990s as a decadent, tired, and infidel giant incapable of marshaling the strength and will needed to defeat a determined foe.

At the very moment when scholars should be vigorously encouraging the study of Islamic history, theology, and religious law, Holmes's own confusions illustrate the costs of failing to take the religious dimension of jihadist terror ism seriously. He contends correctly that to understand "bin Laden's decision to declare war on the United States" and "the concrete historical circumstances" that "provoked" it, it is necessary to understand the role of the Afghan war, which began with the Soviet invasion in 1979. But he misunderstands the war and draws the wrong conclusions because he forces Muslim fighters into the distorting framework of secular politics:

> Although it failed miserably in the Middle East, pan-Arabism was spectacularly successful, at least in popular perception, in the multinational effort to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. An international brigade drawn from diverse Arab countries helped to defeat a superpower. After the Soviet retreat in 1989, however, this "homeless phalanx" of demobilized Arab warriors was left in the lurch. Its members became mujahideen drifters in search of a jihad.

Pan-Arabism, a secular ideology that envisaged a single Arab nation arising out of the hodge-podge of artificial Middle Eastern nation-states created by Western powers in the twentieth century, did fail miserably. In 1967 it suffered a devastating setback as a result of Israel's lightning defeat of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in the Six Day War. Israel and Egypt hammered the final nail in the coffin with their historic 1979 peace agreement at Camp David, signed months before the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Indeed, pan-Arabism was already dead and buried during the period Holmes claims Arabs in Afghanistan were rallying to its cause. Neither in popular perception nor in reality did it have anything to do with the religious war waged by the so-called Afghan Arabs, many of whom, contrary to the impression Holmes gives, were not Arabs at all but Muslims of varied ethnicity.

By evoking a phantom pan-Arabism and discounting the religious beliefs of self-proclaimed religious warriors, Holmes obscures, among other things, the importance to all Muslims of Muhammad's paradigmatic undertaking as a religious warrior: his persecution in Mecca, the greatest city of the time; his repudiation of it as corrupt and decadent; his retreat to Medina; his guerilla-like military operations against Mecca, using Medina as a base; and, after eight years, his triumphant return to and conquest of Mecca. The story of Muhammad the out-manned prophet who eventually, in the name of Allah, conquers the great power of the day forms a model of religious war for all Muslims that has been exploited by the leaders of militant Islam and helps explain Islam's transnational reach. Thus, for example, Shiite Persian Islamists in Iran surmount the traditional Arab-Persian enmity to collaborate with Lebanese Shiite Arabs of Hizbullah against Israel and also overcome the Shiite-Sunni divide to support Palestinian Sunni Arabs of Hamas against both Israel and non-Islamist Fatah.

Holmes proposes "an alternative and more promising framework" for understanding Muslim terrorism:

> Rage at perceived injury can be exacerbated by extraneous emotions such as envy, sexual guilt, and self-hate, but is crystallized and disciplined by narratives of blame, promulgated by savvy entrepreneurs of political violence. Traditions of religious radicalism play some role in fomenting such rage, just as the institutions of organized Islam, such as zakat or obligatory almsgiving, provide resources that terrorists can exploit. Religious devotion detached from a vivid narrative of blame will not funnel diffuse rage toward a specif-

> ic target. Any sensible response to 9/11 must therefore aim at unraveling, or weakening the plausibility of, the narratives of blame that implicate the West in general, and the United States in particular in injuring and humiliating Muslims.

But his alternative framework is skewed by the same false dichotomy that plagues his entire analysis. The terrorists' specific grievances cannot be distinguished from their underlying religious beliefs, as he would have it, because for Islamists the specific grievances are formed by and refracted through underlying religious belief. Of course "religious devotion detached from a vivid narrative of blame" will not produce terrorists. But that is no reason to concentrate on "narratives of blame" at the expense of religious belief, for Islamist narratives of blame are shot through with religious categories, values, and judgments.

Holmes acknowledges that many terrorists profess to having been motivated by devotion to God. But he insists that "Sometimes people do what they do for reasons they profess, but private motivations cannot always be gleaned from public justifications." Therefore, we must appreciate the range of Islamist motives:

> Does Ayman al-Zawahiri aspire to overthrow Mubarak because the latter is an apostate, or because he is a tyrant? Do extreme religious views cause political violence, or does terrorism occur when young men feel compelled to erase perceived personal or group shame by an act of homicidal rage? Violent youths who viscerally enjoy fighting and killing have a powerful motive to re-describe as "a religious duty" acts of cruelty that they perform for wholly nonreligious reasons? [sic] When secular and religious rationales are equally credible and would each independently trigger the action to be explained, we cannot know with any certainty that the decisive factor was religion.

It follows that we should not prior to investigation favor psychological and political explanations or religious ones but recognize their intricate interaction. It follows as well that, given the poor state of our present knowledge of Islam, we ought to devote much greater resources to the study of the religious dimension of jihadist terrorism. Instead, Holmes, a scholar of Enlightenment political theory, advises us to spend less time on religion and concentrate on the secular causes of jihadist terrorism.

Or rather, when it contributes to Bush-bashing, Holmes aggressively demotes religion's importance, but if it contributes to Bush-bashing, Holmes is also quite pleased to elevate religion's importance. Indeed, for the cause, Holmes is willing to elevate it to absurd heights. So, for example, to explain the failure of coalition forces to secure Baghdad after its liberation, he asserts that "Deeply held Christian beliefs prevented the Administration from grasping the fatal threat posed to the United States by religious certainty." Thus, according to Holmes, to understand the jihadists, who proclaimed a religious war against America, one must concentrate on the secular causes of their rage.

But to explain the wartime leadership of President Bush one must concentrate on religious causes. Never mind that Bush declared repeatedly during the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom that military force was justified against Saddam for a variety of secular reasons — to combat the multiple threats posed by Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and his program for producing them; to uphold international law, of which Saddam had been in almost continuous violation since signing a UN-sponsored cease-fire agreement in 1991; and to lay the groundwork for an alternative to autocracy in the Muslim Middle East. In Holmes's view, to understand the Bush administration's blunders in Baghdad it is necessary to appreciate the irrational mindset stemming from the president's Christian faith.

The terrorists' grievances cannot be distinguished from their underlying religious beliefs — they are formed by and refracted through them.

Actually, to bash those progressives who had the temerity to provide intellectual support for the invasion of Iraq, Holmes is willing to go even further in magnifying the importance of religion. He castigates Paul Berman for "contribut[ing] significantly to the stifling of national debate about the wisdom of the war in the run-up to the invasion." This is a bizarre charge; certainly Holmes provides no evidence to support it other than to recite and criticize the argument of Berman's *Power and the Idealists: Or, the Passion of Joschka Fischer and its Aftermath* (2005) and his *Terror and Liberalism* (2003). Indeed, how could an intellectual like Berman stifle debate even if he wanted to? He commands no troops, he neither owns nor runs media properties, he is not an editor controlling who says what when where, and he is not a tenured professor serving as an intellectual gatekeeper at our universities. In fact, the bad Holmes, in the fashion of the postmodern or reactionary left, uses "stifling of national debate" as a synonym for arguing publicly and forcefully for views with which he disagrees.

And then he levels the contrived accusation that "Berman labors to muffle the role of religion in 9/11, claiming that Islamic fundamentalism is really 'a modern ideological temptation, familiar to Europeans'." Never mind that Berman's argument is that Islamic extremism represents a toxic melding of European ideas drawn from fascist and existentialist thought *and* Muslim religious belief. What is astonishing is the patronizing lecture Holmes proceeds to deliver — in flagrant contradiction of the argument he has developed at length earlier — on the primacy of religion to jihadist terrorism:

> Totalitarian ideologies — as Berman, too, learned, in college — contained secularized eschatologies. Totalitarians rejected the religious answers but retained the religious questions, re-creating a world view

> that contained heretics and orthodoxy, sacred texts and martyrs, banishments and anathema, contamination and purity. So why is Berman so sure, when he sees these ideas resurface among Islamists, that they derive from the secularized religion of totalitarianism rather than from religion itself, which lent them to totalitarianism in the first place. After all, antiliberalism did not begin with the twentieth-century totalitarianism. Nor is apocalypse a twentieth-century idea. Monotheism can itself be deeply antiliberal, to the extent that it makes a self-appointed vanguard of the faithful so certain of what God wants that it feels free to use coercion to force the rest of society to submit to God's ostensible will.

Holmes's contempt for those who would reduce Islamic beliefs to secular impulses and ideas and his admonition to appreciate the causal efficacy of "religion itself" would be directed more appropriately toward himself — the person who, in an earlier chapter, did his best to discount the religious dimension of jihadist terrorism — than toward Paul Berman, one of the first intellectuals after September 11 to bring to the public's attention the importance of the writings of Sayyid Qutb, a founding father of contemporary Muslim extremism.

Holmes's reckless critique of the neoconservatives is further proof of his willingness to play fast and loose with evidence. He derides Robert Kagan, author of the best-selling *Of Paradise and Power* (2003), as a "Bush-league Nietzschean" who believes the European preference for multilateralism, diplomacy, and international law is nothing but a weapon of the weak designed to keep the militarily powerful United States in check. The putdown is clever but the charge is bogus, and both are unworthy of a major-league scholar. For no apparent reason, other than that it conflicts with the caricature he is determined to construct, Holmes dismisses the concluding section of Kagan's book as "basically unserious." Yet Kagan makes a clear and compelling case that America should seek to fortify an international order based on law while recognizing that such an order and the gentler arts of diplomacy that support it must, in a dangerous world, be backed by military might and the readiness to use it when necessary.

He also mocks Charles Krauthammer for asserting that jihadist terrorism is rooted in "the cauldron of political oppression, religious intolerance and social ruin in the Arab-Islamic world — oppression transmuted and deflected by regimes with no legitimacy into the virulent, murderous anti-Americanism that exploded upon us on 9/11." Holmes rightly criticizes those in the administration and outside it who hoped to democratize Iraq but overlooked democracy's "social, economic, cultural and psychological preconditions." And he correctly points out that the neoconservative emphasis on how regimes shape character ought to have prepared them to recognize that living under Saddam's brutal tyranny was likely to have bred passivity, fatalism, cruelty, and violence that "unfitted the Iraqi people for democracy, for a time at least." But it twists the

truth to claim that "the neoconservatives defend two diametrically opposed propositions: first, that the jihadists hate freedom and, second, that they hate their own lack of freedom." To manufacture the contradiction Holmes must overlook the very Krauthammer lines he quotes about how religion can *transmute* and *deflect* religious and nonreligious anger. And while he's at it, Holmes must overlook his own argument that "religious teachings can intensify and coordinate preexistent anger." To his sardonic contention that Krauthammer and other neoconservatives "admit, implicitly, that jihadist rage is not only understandable but even in good measure just," it suffices to answer that it is perfectly possible to recognize the injustice that plays a role in turning a man into a cold-blooded murderer without regarding cold-blooded murder to be just in any measure.

Holmes declares, outrageously, that the administration has championed a lawless response to terrorism and in so doing has become like the terrorists it opposes.

In criticizing the Bush administration directly, Holmes goes over well-trodden ground. Certainly many criticisms hit their mark. The administration's diplomacy has often been clumsy or swaggering. The Defense Department, which had primary responsibility for the reconstruction of Iraq, was woefully unprepared. Since the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the administration has made serious and costly blunders in the effort to bring stability and democracy to Iraq. And in responding to the legal issues that have arisen since 9/11, the Bush administration continues to overreach. But Holmes's frequent and egregious errors of omission and commission threaten to call his whole enterprise into disrepute.

Consider a sample of the errors: First, Holmes denounces Bush administration officials for their "habit of politicizing intelligence." Yet three government reports — *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004), the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's *Report on the US Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq* (2004), and the *Report of the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction* (2005), which was prepared under the supervision of Judge Laurence Silberman and Senator Charles Robb — found no evidence that the administration pressured the intelligence community to cook evidence and no evidence that it presented an inaccurate picture to the public of the intelligence community's findings.

Second, Holmes declares that the administration has championed a lawless response to terrorism and in so doing has become like the terrorists it opposes. In reaching this outrageous judgment, he ignores the unprecedented concern with legal formalities and

international law that characterized the run-up to the Iraq war, beginning with the October 2002 congressional authorization to use military force, proceeding through the unanimous passage in November 2002 of UN Security Council resolution 1441, and culminating with the Bush administration's colorable claim under international law that in view of Iraq's material breach of resolution 1441 and 16 previous UN Security Council resolutions, including the 1991 UN-sponsored cease-fire agreement, the U.S. was entitled to use force to remove Saddam from power. In bringing his indictment, Holmes also fails to consider that at every juncture the Bush administration has sought legal justification for its claims to broad, and in some cases extravagantly broad, executive power, confirming the importance it attaches to law in wartime, even in those cases where it got the law wrong. And though he devotes an entire chapter to America's sobering history of curtailing civil liberties during wartime, Holmes attaches little significance to several crucial facts: By any historical measure, the curtailing of civil liberties in the war on terror has been slight; the speed with which the Supreme Court has moved to restore them has been rapid; and the administration's prompt acquiescence in the Court's judgments has vindicated the vitality of the constitutional separation of powers.

Third, Holmes proclaims throughout his book that the decision to invade Iraq was obviously wrong and that it has led to an unequivocal disaster. But he excludes from his strategic and moral calculations the cost of not invading. To mention only one of many frequently overlooked points: He is right to call attention to the tragedy of the tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians who have died as an unintended consequence of the invasion. But missing is any reference to the massive loss of life that was an unintended but foreseeable consequence of Holmes's preferred policy — the U.S.-led containment regime in place before the March 2003 invasion. UNICEF estimated that 60,000 children were dying each year under containment[4] because Saddam stole money that, under the UN sanctioned Oil-for-Food Program, was earmarked for food and medicine and used it instead to build palaces and support his army.

Add to these serious errors of omission and commission Holmes's predilection for caricature and his blatant contradictions of his own headline theses, and one is forced to conclude that his arguments simply cannot be trusted.

What kind of an intellectual environment accounts for the publication by a leading scholar and a prestigious university press of so untrustworthy a book? In fact, the good Holmes, the shrewd student of liberal constitutional government, inadvertently sheds light on the forces that have shaped and sustained the bad Holmes. War has a tendency, he suggests, to undermine the conditions that nourish responsible thinking:

> Wartime leaders, too, need some

[4] Walter Russell Mead, "Deadlier than War," *Washington Post* (March 12, 2003).

> form of adversarial process to protect them from cognitive biases and false certainties. Excessive secrecy may breed disconnection from reality. Panic may spread inside the bunker, and illicit private interests may colonize public policy if decision making is monopolized by a few like-minded individuals who never listen attentively to alternative points of view. One-party and single branch government weakens incentives for decision makers to acknowledge errors and make midstream readjustments. The consequences cannot possibly be favorable.

But wartime leaders are not the only ones to get trapped in cocoons that cut them off from the free flow of information and lively exchange of opinion on which accurate understanding depends.

The academy in which Holmes lives and prospers and which, with great fanfare, sent his flawed polemic to the public has for some time now been depriving its members of the intellectual benefits of transparency, accountability, and dissent. As he foresees — albeit in a different context — and as his book vividly illustrates, the consequences are not favorable. Unaccountable to outside authority, largely sheltered from opposing points of view, given to seeing themselves as a saving remnant both unappreciated by the broader public and besieged by an evil government, professors at our leading universities have created an intellectual environment that has undermined the conditions that foster free and unbiased exploration of the great issues of the day.

Holmes's book does, as he hoped, make a "modest contribution," but not the one he intended. This critical moment demands serious and systematic study of the multitude of hard questions raised by the need to defeat our enemies while respecting the moral and political principles that constitute our country. Instead of rising to the occasion, Holmes does his part to further vulgarize public debate, degrade university culture, and, not least, weaken the nation's ability to defeat a deadly, hidden, globally dispersed, and implacable foe. American readers who rely on it will be condemned to Sun Tzu's worst case, knowing neither their own country nor its enemies.

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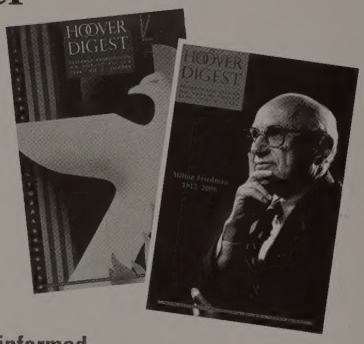

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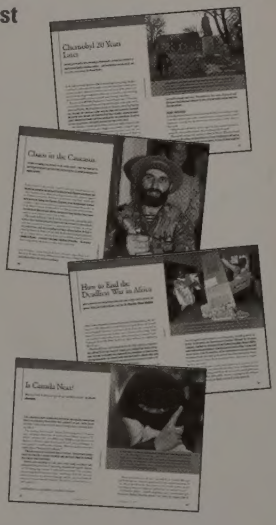

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